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ITALY...Juventus keeper Gianluigi Buffon keeps his focus despite a cloud of smoke engulfing his goal area during the 1-1 draw at Roma

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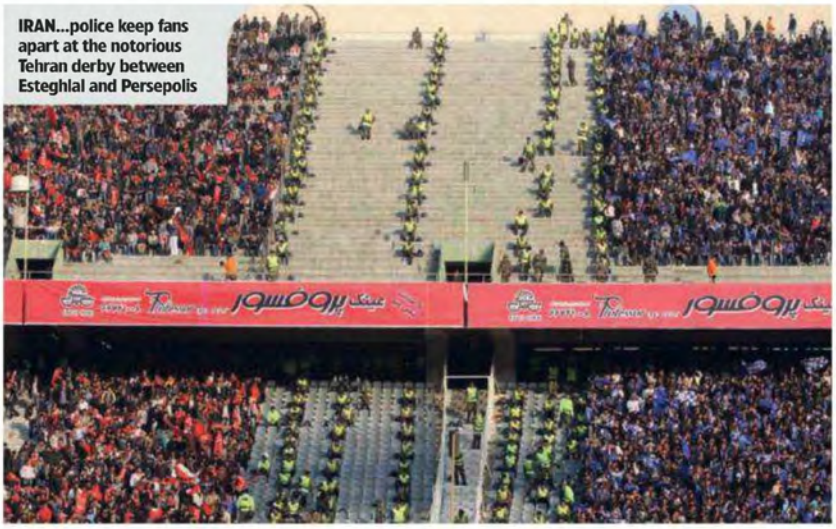
JAPAN...David Villa feels the pain as he breaks a leg during the Club World Cup semi-final between Barcelona and Al Sadd



IRAN...police keep fans apart at the notorious Tehran derby between Esteghlal and Persepolis

GERMANY...Bayern Munich keeper Manuel Neuer and Mario Gomez (centre) defend against Stuttgart in the Bundesliga

ENGLAND...Martin O'Neill celebrates a goal during his first win as manager of Sunderland

TURKEY...a Besiktas fan enjoys their Europa League win at home to Stoke City

HOLLAND...AZ goalkeeper Esteban Alvarado retaliates against an Ajax supporter who attacked him during a Cup tie

PICTURES OF THE MONTH QR CODE

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FROM THE EDITOR

The African Nations Cup finals never cease to generate excitement and interest in the international game. Any tournament that incurs the wrath of the Premier League has to be in the wider interests of football. This time around, the failure of Nigeria, Cameroon and Egypt in qualifying means that there's a greater chance of lesser names making their mark on the tournament.

We have tried to provide as detailed a guide as possible to the teams (page 44), but we have not been helped by a late legal challenge to Burkina Faso's participation by their qualifying group rivals Namibia. Meanwhile, co-hosts Equatorial Guinea have been allowed to bend the rules on international eligibility, fielding mercenaries from South America and elsewhere in Africa (see page 51).

> The irony of Sepp Blatter's recent re-invention as a crusader against corruption has not been lost on many in Africa

The irony of Sepp Blatter's recent re-invention as a crusader against corruption has not been lost on many in Africa. For years, the FIFA president has turned a blind eye to corruption among his closest supporters at FIFA, while many African federations have been allowed to bend rules and regulations, without fear of sanction.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1. Barcelona sweep past Santos to win Club World Cup ..... Pages 28 and 94
2. African Nations Cup kicks off ..... Page 44
3. Universidad de Chile win the Sudamericana Cup ..... Page 103
4. Carlo Ancelotti appointed as new PSG coach ..... Page 12
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HOLLAND

McClaren back at Twente

Dutch return...McClaren

Former England manager Steve McClaren has returned for a second spell as coach of Twente, following the sacking of Co Adriaanse.

McClaren led Twente to the Dutch title in 2010 before less successful spells at Wolfsburg and Nottingham Forest.

"I know the club very well," says McClaren. "I know the people, I know the fans, I know the team and it's coming back into an environment which I know. I came back because of the ambition of the people, the ambition of the club.

"I was just waiting for an opportunity with ambitious people. I know the people I'm going to work with and I see a team that I can develop."

GERMANY

Reus chooses Dortmund over Bayern

Germany international Marco Reus has opted to join Borussia Dortmund instead of Bayern Munich this summer after Dortmund agreed to pay his current club Borussia Monchengladbach the £14.4million needed to trigger the release clause in his contract.

The highly-rated 22-year-old said that he feared that his opportunities in Munich would be limited, explaining: "I decided this way because I feel there is more potential [in Dortmund] for playing in Europe and measuring myself against the best.

"In my eyes, Dortmund are the better club."

Opportunity...Reus

"Football is cash and corruption. It's capitalism. And capitalism is death"

Twenty-four-year-old ex-Sporting Gijon central defender Javi Poves stands by the decision he made last summer to quit the game and go to university

Critic...Jennings

FIFA

Reporters refuse FIFA invite to join Blatter

Four investigative journalists have turned down invitations to assist in FIFA president Sepp Blatter's reform project – following the earlier withdrawal from the process of Transparency International and Football Supporters Europe.

Transparency International worked with FIFA last summer on proposals for significant changes in administrative operation. It then stepped back after clashing over the terms of appointment of Swiss governance expert Mark Pieth to lead a so-called "solution committee".

The four journalists - Englishman Andrew Jennings, Swiss Jean-Francois Tanda and Germans Thomas Kistner and Jens Weinreich - said they believed the reforms process to be flawed and had been created to protect Blatter rather than to lay bare all the fault lines within the world federation.

The four also questioned the independence of the "solutions committee" and its membership. One particular target was Francois Moriniere, director general of the French Amaury group. It owns L'Equipe and France Football, whose long-running Ballon d'Or award was swallowed up by FIFA in 2010.

HEROES & VILLAINS

RONNIE MCFALL

The second-longest serving manager in Europe – behind Manchester United's Alex Ferguson – celebrated 25 years in charge of Portadown in Northern Ireland.

BAS DOST

The striker scored five times for Heerenveen in their 5-0 pre-Christmas win against Excelsior, and in so doing leapfrogged five players to the top of the Eredivisie scoring charts.

Merry Christmas...Dost

JUPP HEYNCKES

Bayern Munich's 3-0 win over Cologne kept them top of the table going in to the winter recess and gave their boss a record-breaking 455th Bundesliga victory as either player or coach.

ROBIN VAN PERSIE

The Dutchman scored 35 league goals for Arsenal in 2011.

Great year...Van Persie

VLADIMIR ROMANOV

The controversial Lithuanian owner of Hearts said the Scottish Premier League club would no longer receive his financial backing, prompting further concerns over the payment of players' wages.

Controversial...Romanov

NEUCHATEL XAMAX

The Chechen-owned Swiss club were deducted four points for violating their license and failing to pay players.

EGYPT

The national side must play their first two home 2014 World Cup qualifiers at least 100 kilometres from Cairo as punishment for violence ahead of the World Cup play-off against Algeria in November 2009.

Violence...Egypt fans

MOUCHARAFOU ANJORIN

The Benin FA chief was named on FIFA's Under-20 World Cup committee, three weeks after his release from five months on remand on embezzlement charges.

"The way Leonardo treated this guy makes my blood boil. For a good six months he put him in an impossible situation so he could eventually employ his friend"

Ex-Paris Saint-Germain coach Vahid Halilhodzic takes aim at the PSG director of sport for not keeping faith with Antoine Kombouare

ENGLAND

Suarez and Liverpool misjudge the mood over eight-match ban

The response of Luis Suarez and Liverpool to the eight-game ban imposed for a racist comment to Patrice Evra raised a string of questions, including the Uruguayan's expectation of the length of his stay at Anfield.

Down the years clubs, managers and agents have all acknowledged the importance of a player demonstrating his commitment to his new life, to his new club and to his new team-mates by learning about life and language in a different country.

The success with which a succession of foreign players have committed themselves to Liverpool is demonstrated by the number who, having long left Anfield, still speak English with a pronounced Scouse twang.

The vast majority of emigrant footballers from Latin America go to Spain, Portugal or Italy where a great deal less is demanded in lifestyle and language adjustment. But coming to northern Europe is very different and agents and clubs do not always make that clear either in advance of the deal or after its completion.

Suarez arrived on Merseyside with "form" in terms of ungentlemanly conduct over his match-turning handball against Ghana in the 2010 World Cup and then a shoulder-biting incident while playing for Ajax in Holland.

After the 1-1 Anfield draw between Liverpool and Manchester United in October, Evra complained to referee Andre Marriner and then in an interview with a French TV channel that Suarez had abused him. Evra said: "There are cameras. You can see him saying a certain word at least 10 times. There's no place for that in 2011. The referee knows very well what he was saying."

Ill-judged...Liverpool players (above) show support for Suarez (below left, with Evra)

An FA inquiry led to an independent commission and the ban and a fine. The care with which the panel had taken was laid bare by the 115-page report. In the meantime, heat over the issue of racism in football had been exacerbated by the Anton Ferdinand/John Terry incident and by FIFA president Sepp Blatter's crassly naive comments.

While all those involved in the Terry incident clammed up after the initial statements, Liverpool took a different approach. The team's T-shirt support of Suarez before a Premier League game against Wigan appeared, with the benefit of hindsight, significantly misjudged.

In the middle of it all Suarez revealed a little more of his character by incurring a one-game ban for a gesture to Fulham fans who had jeered him for, in their view, going to ground too easily.

Then came the inquiry, the punishment and the report followed by Liverpool's grudging acceptance of the ban. Liverpool responded that the club had "supported Luis Suarez because we fundamentally do not believe that Luis on that day - or frankly any other - did or would engage in a racist act...In its determination to prove its conclusions to the public through a clearly subjective 115-page document, the FA panel has damaged the reputation of one of the Premier League's best players, deciding he should be punished and banned for perhaps a quarter of a season."

Suarez issued a statement in which he protested: "Never, I repeat, never, have I had any racial problem with a team-mate or individual who was of a different race or colour to mine. Never.

"I'm very upset at feeling so powerless whilst being accused of something which I did not, nor would not, ever do. In my country "negro" is a word we use commonly, a word which doesn't show any lack of respect and is even less so a form of racist abuse. Based on this, everything which has been said so far is totally false."

While the modern-day superstar may be cocooned from daily interaction with fans and the stresses and strains of their daily lives, this does not mean players can ignore the norms of the society in which they earn their living. The same applies to migrant workers in any profession, in any foreign country.

Keir Radnedge

"Kroos already has done more than Netzer and Overath when they were 21"

Not normally a fan of hyperbole, Bayern Munich coach Jupp Heynckes favourably compares two of Germany's all-time midfield greats to his side's young Toni Kroos (right)

GOALS we'd like to see again

1 GUALBERTO MOJICA
Oriente Petrolero v Guabira
Plays a one-two and cushions the ball on his chest before volleying on the turn.

2 DIEGO MORALES
Tigre v Velez Sarsfield
Cuts in from the left flank, beats three defenders and curls the ball into the far top corner.

3 NEYMAR
Santos v Kashiwa Reysol
Checks back to beat his marker, before curling a left-footed shot into the top corner of the net.

4 LIONEL MESSI
Barcelona v Santos
Neat passing as Barcelona thread the ball to the Argentinian, who calmly lifts it over the goalkeeper from close range.

5 DAVID DI MICHELE
Lecce v Parma
A stunning overhead kick from 17 yards that leaves the goalkeeper stranded.

6 TIM HOWARD
Everton v Bolton Wanderers
A punt upfield catches the wind and beats the opposing keeper.

GOALS WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN
To see video footage of these goals and many more we've selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to: bit.ly/vErfRA

WINNERS

EDUARDO VARGAS
Set a competition record of 11 goals as Universidad de Chile won the Sudamericana Cup for the first time.

TIGRES UANL
Ended a 29-year wait as they won the Mexican title, defeating Santos Laguna in the Apertura Final.

OLIMPIA
The club from Asuncion won their first Paraguayan league title for 11 years when they beat Rubio Nu in the clausura Final.

LOSERS

BAYERN MUNICH
Lost to Borussia Dortmund in the race to sign Germany starlet Marco Reus from Monchengladbach.

DAVID VILLA
The Barcelona and Spain forward broke his left leg in the Club World Cup, which may put him out of the European Championship this summer.

OMAR GONZALEZ
LA Galaxy defender damaged knee ligaments shortly after arriving in Germany for a short-term loan at Nuremberg.

"Was it a red card? Not while I've got a hole in my bum"

Wolverhampton Wanderers' manager Mick McCarthy disagrees with Nenad Milijas' sending off against Arsenal

FRANCE

PSG look to Ancelotti to turn on the charm

French football's worst-kept secret was finally made official at the end of December when mega-rich Paris Saint-Germain moved to boost their worldwide reputation by bringing in the highly respected Italian coach Carlo Ancelotti.

The 52-year-old – who made his managerial reputation with Parma, Juventus and Milan – was sacked as Chelsea boss last year. He arrived in the French capital to replace Antoine Kombouare, a dignified man who knew his job was on the line from the minute the Qatar Sports Investment Group bought a controlling stake in the club last June.

Despite a respectable domestic season, which saw PSG on top of the Ligue 1 table going into the winter break, there was always the feeling that Kombouare was simply keeping the seat warm for someone deemed to have more clout on the international stage. The club's limp exit from the Europa League in December was the final nail in his coffin.

PSG have paid a hefty price to hook their man. Ancelotti's two-and-a-half year contract is worth a whopping £413,000 a month, which puts him at number seven in the chart of the Top 10 best-paid managers in football.

Kombouare was "only" on £115,000 a month, so what does the extra cash buy? Doubtless the kind of international profile and bulging contacts book that Kombouare simply couldn't offer. Plus a certain urbane charm that will appeal to traditionally conservative Middle Eastern owners.

Sat alongside PSG sporting director Leonardo after his appointment was announced, Ancelotti trotted out the usual platitudes about making PSG a real force on the European scene. More interestingly, specific targets include Champions League qualification for next season, with 2015 fixed as the year when the club must be "playing a major role" in the competition.

At least that sounds realistic. Because even with Ancelotti at the helm and an open chequebook to play with, it's going to be hard to attract world-class players to the club immediately. And even if the rumours are true that the club's failure to bring in David Beckham as a marquee signing in January had as much to do with Ancelotti's lack of enthusiasm for the Englishman on a sporting level as with the Beckham family's reluctance to leave California, the truly big names won't be swayed by money alone.

Money will talk

It took time for Manchester City to bring in the big stars, despite the advantage of performing in one of the world's real glamour leagues. Ligue 1 still has a way to go before it's seen as a fitting stage for the world's greatest players to display their talents, so talk of Thiago Silva and Marek Hamsik arriving in Paris right now seems ridiculously fanciful. While there appears to be more substance in the rumours surrounding both Kaka and Alexandre Pato, it would still be a major shock were either player to sign for PSG. Sooner or later, though, money will talk.

Ancelotti's right-hand man in the new-look coaching team at PSG is the club's former player Claude Makelele, who only hung up his boots at the end of the last campaign. It seems a sensible move, despite the 38-year-old's lack of management experience, because of his understanding of French culture, the peculiarities of PSG as a club and the demands of the French championship. Ancelotti is also bringing in his preferred conditioning guru, Giovanni Mauri, who he worked with at Milan and Chelsea.

Urbane...new Paris Saint-Germain coach Carlo Ancelotti

The Italian's reign as PSG coach began with an early January 1-0 defeat in a mid-season friendly in Dubai against...Milan. Somewhat ironically, the winning goal was scored by Pato. The result, of course, doesn't matter. But the match does prove that Paris Saint-Germain are already rubbing shoulders with the clubs at football's top table.

It will, of course, take time for PSG to match them on the field, but as their English blueprint Manchester City have proved, a good dollop of patience and limitless resources will eventually bring its rewards.

It will be interesting to see whether Ancelotti will still be at the helm when the trophy cupboard starts to fill up.

Howard Johnson

"China, Dubai or pension"

Former Real Madrid and Spain midfielder Guti succinctly sums up his options after being released by Besiktas

■ OBITUARIES

Gary ABLETT
(1965-2012)
The former Liverpool and Everton defender is the only player to have won the FA Cup with both Merseyside clubs.

Ablett...double hero

Sergio BUSO
(1950-2011)
A goalkeeper with Bologna, he was Italy's assistant coach to Roberto Donadoni between 2006 and 2008.

CATE
(1973-2011)
The former Sao Paulo and Sampdoria striker was killed when his car was involved in a collision with a truck in his native Brazil.

Hector NUNEZ
(1936-2011)
One-time striker with Nacional and Valencia who coached Uruguay to victory at the 1995 Copa America.

Evgeni RUDAKOV
(1942-2011)
The former Dynamo Kiev goalkeeper, who reached the 1972 European Championship Final with the Soviet Union and won the Cup-winners Cup in 1975.

Rudakov (second right)...Soviet stopper

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Image matters in football – but so does the truth

It is a rare event when the vibrant and diverse British sporting media sings universally from the same hymn sheet. It happened, though, in the case of the eight-match ban imposed on Luis Suarez after a thorough FA investigation into allegations of racial abuse against Patrice Evra in a Premier League match versus Manchester United.

There was complete agreement both that the FA had investigated a sensitive matter with commendable thoroughness, and that Suarez's club, Liverpool, had blundered badly in its awkward and outraged response at every stage of the process: the allegation, the charge, the hearing, the punishment, and the fallout. There was much talk, and well justified, of the potential damage to the reputation of the global brand of Liverpool FC.

> The old way of being economical with the truth looks increasingly more absurd

Did this happen because the reaction of the club through many weeks of the case was led by men of football rather than PR specialists? It is a valid question to ask when by far the most vocal voice from Anfield was that of manager Kenny Dalglish, who spoke with an indignant tone and fierce loyalty to the player.

Dalglish was following the traditional pattern in football of defending your own come what may and trying to fight a way out of a possible stern punishment to a star member of the squad. With an issue as significant as racial abuse, when the matter in hand goes well beyond a mere game to a crucial aspect of behaviour in society, that is not necessarily a wise policy.

We can never know whether an instant expression of regret and apology on the day of the match, a swift explanation by Suarez that he genuinely believed that he wasn't being offensive, could have avoided all the subsequent pain of negative headlines and an eight-match ban. It is certainly possible – and it is the considered view of experts in the field of communications and PR.

There isn't another business in the world apart from sport that would leave decisions about the vital matter of its good name and its global image to non-experts. But that's how it is so often in football, where the tradition is for the manager to have vast authority and control.

One of the most highly respected British sports PR experts told me that he had recently been approached by a Premier League club to head their communications team. He loves the game, he thought he could do a valuable job, but he declined because he would not be guaranteed scope to make crucial decisions on crisis issues such as the Suarez affair.

The problems manifest themselves on a smaller scale too. In the modern age of social media, instant news and increased media literacy, the old football way of being economical with the truth looks increasingly more absurd.

There have been a couple of recent cases involving Manchester United, but it could be many clubs. They gave the false reason of "a virus" for the absence from the team of midfielder Darren Fletcher, which led to unfounded speculation. Eventually, the club revealed the player was suffering from a debilitating and potentially career-threatening bowel condition.

Sympathy abounded for the player, as it always would have. But there was bewilderment and dismay that the club had given out misleading information. Was this a truth that needed suppressing?

On New Year's Eve the supporters of United were amazed to discover that Wayne Rooney was absent from the team to play Blackburn Rovers, not least when there were already 13 players injured. Alex Ferguson said that the player hadn't trained well that week and had a few "strains". In fact, Rooney had been dropped and fined a weeks' wages after a night out.

United lost 3-2 to Blackburn, and the club lost credibility for giving out misinformation. It was plain daft.

Image and truth both matter in the modern world of sport – and football needs to understand that. WS

"Mansour just wanted a toy. I think if he doesn't win a big prize immediately, he'll go out and buy another plaything"

Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis (right) pours scorn on Manchester City's mega-rich Gulf owners

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Warner re-emerges to claim World Cup rights sold for a dollar

"You won't have Nixon to kick around anymore because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference" – famous words which come to mind whenever Jack Warner puts his head back above the football parapet.

Richard Nixon's bitter sign-off was delivered after his defeat by incumbent Pat Brown in the California governorship poll of 1962, one year after his US presidential election loss to John F Kennedy. Of course, Nixon did defy his own prediction by achieving his presidential ambitions six years later.

He could not keep away – and Warner appears much the same.

He quit as president of CONCACAF, as president of "his" Caribbean Football Union, as consultant to the Trinidad & Tobago Football Federation and as a FIFA vice-president last summer rather than face a FIFA ethics hearing into allegations of bribery at Mohamed Bin Hammam's infamous CFU conference the previous May.

He threatened a "football tsunami", but his first attacks were little more than damp squibs. He then insisted he would hold fire until after Bin Hammam, the former AFC president and one-time Sepp Blatter rival, had challenged his FIFA life ban at the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

But, of course, Warner could not resist letting rip again after a conference in Zurich just before Christmas in which FIFA took over reorganising the CFU in its own preferred image. Warner's timing was perfect. He chose what had already been a bad week for Blatter and FIFA to open fire himself.

Blatter and FIFA were shown up badly by a statement from the Supreme Cantonal Court in Zug. This demonstrated that, while Blatter was telling the world in October that he intended opening up the case file in the long-running ISL saga, he knew that FIFA was, simultaneously, party to a court action seeking to keep it closed.

Warner – now Minister of Works in Trinidad & Tobago – then claimed that, through a Mexican company called OTI, he had been awarded World Cup television rights in the territory for as little as $1 in return for helping Blatter become FIFA president in 1998.

Furthermore, Warner said he, personally, was also sold the rights for the 2002 and 2006 World Cups after supporting Blatter in an even more bitter re-election campaign in 2002, and that he also bought rights for the 2010 and 2014 tournaments.

He said that he and Bin Hammam had played "extremely critical roles in [Blatter's 2002] re-election as well as in preventing several members of the then executive committee from instituting criminal charges against him".

The "criminal charges" note referred to a complaint about Blatter's running of FIFA which was submitted to the Swiss authorities by the European members of the FIFA ExCo. They had acted on a dossier provided by the organisation's then general secretary, Michel Zen-Ruffinen. After Blatter's re-election the complaint was withdrawn and Zen-Ruffinen was sacked.

Fighting back... Warner has made new claims against FIFA president Blatter

Gifts and contradictions

Warner's statement also asserted that the 2010 and 2014 World Cup TV rights had been "sold to me personally... using the CFU as the vehicle". He said that the profits from the various TV deals had been used to fund grass-roots football development in the Caribbean. Further "deals" had been set up linking the 2011 FIFA presidential election with World Cup rights.

Warner said: "In 2011, in exchange for my support [and by extension the support of the CFU and the CONCACAF] in the FIFA presidential election, FIFA again offered me the sale of the World Cup rights for 2018 and 2022 as a 'gift' at a nominal fee."

FIFA had also agreed to give CONCACAF a total of $1million for two Goal development projects.

Warner added: "Notwithstanding the inducements offered, I...refused to endorse Sepp Blatter for the 2011 FIFA presidential election."

Back on May 30, Warner wrote to all Caribbean delegates, telling them: "At our last meeting we agreed as a union to support the incumbent Joseph Sepp Blatter in his quest to regain the presidency. I wish to assure you nothing has changed – our mandate was set then and despite it all we must fulfil it."

Still, that was last May. And if a week is a long time in football and politics, how does one categorise eight months?

Keir Radnedge

"I'm not one for pie in the sky promises. We'll have trouble winning anything this season"

Roma's Spanish coach Luis Enrique makes a rod for his own back

AWARDS

Neymar takes South America's player prize

Number one...Neymar

Santos forward Neymar may have been a marginal figure in the Club World Cup Final against Barcelona, but there was some consolation when he was voted South American Footballer of the Year in the annual poll conducted by the Uruguayan daily *El Pais*.

Chilean striker Eduardo Vargas was second, while Neymar's Santos team-mate Paulo Henrique Ganso finished third. Uruguay's Oscar Tabarez was voted Coach of the Year.

Yaya Toure, scorer of Manchester City's goal in the FA Cup Final victory over Stoke City, was voted African Footballer of the Year by the Confederation of African Football. Seydou Keita, the Mali and Barcelona midfielder, was second, ahead of Marseille and Ghana's Andre Ayew.

In other awards, Guangzhou Evergrande's Brazilian forward Muriqui was named China's Player of the Year, while QPR striker Heidar Helguson was named Icelandic Player of the Year by the FA of Iceland. Juventus striker Mirko Vucinic won Montenegro's Player of the Year award and Borussia Dortmund's Robert Lewandowski won the equivalent in Poland.

In Russia, Seydou Doumbia of CSKA Moscow was named Player of the Year, while Serbia's Player of the Year was Aleksandar Kolarov of Manchester City.

Serbian Coach of the Year was Ivan Jovanovich of APOEL Nicosia.

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

With little chance of scoring, why the fuss about corners?

Corner kicks generate excitement. No doubt about that. The tension grows with the imminent possibility of a goal. There is always a roar from the fans when their team gets a corner, there is the mounting tension as the "big guys" go forward and, as the taker carefully positions the ball in the arc, there is frantic pushing and shoving in the penalty area – something the referee may feel obliged to calm down before the kick is taken. And then what?

Well, not much. That possibility of a goal, which the tension seems to turn into a probability, is a lie. Of all the various attacking plays in football, a corner kick may be the least likely to result in a goal.

Can I prove that? I think so. There are some pretty withering statistics from the last two World Cups that don't leave much room for doubt.

During Germany 2006, FIFA recorded that 12 goals were scored from corner kicks – "after a corner kick" is the official term. Only 12, out of a total of 147 goals scored in the tournament's 64 games. While this is already not wildly encouraging, it gets a lot, lot worse. Because during those 64 games, there was a grand total of 672 corner kicks awarded. Meaning that a "goal after a corner kick" happened only once every 56 corner kicks.

> Combining the past two World Cups, it has taken 58 corners before one goal is scored

Maybe 2006 was a bad year for corner kicks? Seems not. The stats for the 2010 World Cup were marginally worse. The same number of games, 64, produced 145 goals and 608 corner kicks; from those 608 corners, only 10 goals were scored: one goal per 61 corner kicks.

Combining the two World Cups, we get 128 games with 292 goals. From 1,280 corner kicks, 22 goals were scored – which is one goal every 58 corners.

There is another, equally gloomy, way of looking at these stats. Using both tournaments, the average number of corner kicks per game is 10. As a team needs 58 corners before a goal arrives, this means that the average scoring rate from corner kicks is one goal every six games. A team playing in a 20-team league (such as in England or Spain) can therefore expect to take 380 corners during a season, with a slender yield of six or seven goals.

So how come all this excitement for a set play that has a less than two per cent chance of paying off? I don't have any stats on corner kicks from the 1930s, but I suspect things were different back then, that the scoring rate was higher, that there was a real reason to get excited. That has disappeared, but the reaction is still in place, a soccer tribal atavism similar to the idea rugged defenders still seem to have that they can delay the game by belting the ball deep into the crowd.

As to why corner kicks are so ineffective, I can come up with three reasons. First, without any proof at all, I suspect that teams nowadays indulge in mass defending to a much greater extent than they used to. It is not uncommon, at corner kicks, to see all 11 defending players in their own penalty area.

Second, biased referee calls. We know, from masses of TV replays, that defenders and attackers blatantly foul and hold each other all the time on corner kicks. Sometimes, but not nearly often enough, referees call a foul. Logic says that 50 per cent of those calls should be penalty kicks, but most of them go the defenders' way.

Third, simply rank bad corner kicks. Can anyone, other than David Beckham, take consistently accurate corners these days? I mean corner kicks that come down near the penalty spot – not ones that go straight to the goalkeeper, or hit the first defender, or sail over everyone, or land on top of the goal net.

Maybe I should be asking this: does anyone bother to practise taking corner kicks these days? WS

"Mourinho (far right) gave us the names of the guys he wanted as his assistants. They included Pep Guardiola (right) and Luis Enrique"

Marc Ingla, formerly a Barcelona vice-president puts the cat among the pigeons by revealing details of Mourinho's candidacy for the Camp Nou hot seat in 2008

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

National boss... O'Neill

EUROPE

THIERRY HENRY, Arsenal's record goalscorer, returned to the Premier League club on a two-month loan from New York Red Bulls, while 37-year-old **PAUL SCHOLES**, who retired last summer, was re-registered by Manchester United.

Former Spartak Nalchik and Lokomotiv Moscow coach **YURI KRASNOZHAN** took charge of Russian side Anzhi Makhachkala.

PASQUALE MARINO replaced Alberto Malesani as coach of Serie A's Genoa after they lost 6-1 to Napoli.

Eskirsehirspor coach **MICHAEL SKIBBE** left Turkey and returned to Germany to replace Markus Babbel in charge of Hertha Berlin.

Former Sevilla and AEK Athens coach **MANOLO JIMENEZ** replaced Javier Aguirre in charge of Real Zaragoza, who lost eight of their last nine La Liga games.

Caretaker coach **HEIKO VOGEL** signed a permanent deal with Basle after he guided the Swiss club to the last 16 of the Champions League with a 2-1 victory over last season's beaten finalists, Manchester United.

Palermo appointed **BORTOLO MUTTI** as coach for the second time, replacing Devis Mangia after a 2-0 loss to Catania in Serie A.

Former Hapoel Tel Aviv coach **ELI GUTMAN**, who led the club into the group stage of the Champions League last year, replaced Luis Fernandez in charge of Israel.

MICHAEL O'NEILL, who resigned as manager of Shamrock Rovers in the Republic of Ireland at the end of last season, succeeded Nigel Worthington as manager of Northern Ireland.

Italian coach **GIOVANNI DE BIASI** signed a two-year contract to replace Josip Kuze in charge of Albania.

Villarreal youth-team coach **JOSE MOLINA** was put in charge of the Spanish club's first team until the end of the season following the dismissal of Juan Carlos Garrido.

Former Nancy coach **PABLO CORREA** replaced Bernard Casoni in charge of French club Evian.

Former Austria striker **IVICA VASTIC**, has replaced Karl Daxbacher as the coach of Austria Vienna, who had won only one of their last nine matches. Vastic had been working with the club's amateur side.

Lokomotiva Zagreb coach **ANTE CACIC** replaced Krunoslav Jurcic as boss of Dinamo Zagreb.

FERNANDO GOMES succeeded Gilberto Madail as president of the Portuguese Football Federation.

Former deputy chairman of Millwall, **HEATHER RABBATTS** became the first woman to serve on the FA board after being appointed a non-executive director.

In Northern Ireland, **RODNEY MCAREE** replaced Dixie Robinson as manager of Dungannon Swifts, while **GARY HAMILTON** took charge of Glenavon as player-manager.

SOUTH AMERICA

Former Argentina coach **NESTOR PEKERMAN** took charge of Colombia after Leonel Alvarez was sacked.

Former France and Juventus striker **DAVID TREZEGUET** joined River Plate, who are currently second in the Argentinian second division, from United Arab Emirates side Bani Yas.

River signing...Trezeguet

GERARDO MARTINO, who coached Paraguay at the 2010 World Cup, turned down Colombia to take charge of Argentina's Newell's Old Boys.

Argentina's record goalscorer **GABRIEL BATISTUTA** – who scored 56 goals in 78 matches for his country, including hat-tricks at two World Cups – took up his first post since retiring as a player, in 2005, when he joined Colon as technical secretary.

Bolivia striker **MARCELO MARTINS** joined Gremio of Brazil from Ukrainian club Shakhtar Donetsk.

CONCACAF

TED HOWARD was confirmed as CONCACAF acting general secretary while the confederation seeks a permanent successor to Chuck Blazer, who stepped down at Christmas.

Back in Spain...Simeone

Atletico turn to Simeone after sacking Manzano

Former Argentina international **DIEGO SIMEONE** left Racing of Argentina and replaced Gregorio Manzano as coach of Atletico Madrid after they were knocked out of the Spanish Cup 3-1 on aggregate by third-tier Albacete.

Simeone had two spells as a player with Atletico in La Liga, from 1994 to 1997 and from 2003 to 2005.

Meanwhile, Racing replaced Simeone with former Argentina national boss **ALFIO BASILE**.

"Lots of players are calling me to ask about playing in Russia. You'd be surprised by the big names who are interested"

Anzhi Makhachkala striker Samuel Eto'o claims plenty of A-listers are ready to go to eastern Europe

Transfers, sackings and loans

ANDREAS HERZOG, whose 103 caps is a national record for Austria, quit as his country's under-21 coach to become assistant to USA boss Jurgen Klinsmann.

Honduras central defender **VICTOR BERNARDEZ**, who represented his country at the 2010 World Cup and has won 52 caps, joined MLS side San Jose Earthquakes from Anderlecht of Belgium.

AFRICA

CAF Champions League holders Esperance reappointed **MICHEL DECASTEL**, nine years after he first coached the club, to replace Nabil Maaloul, who quit after leading the Tunisian side to continental glory and the domestic double.

ASIA

Former Japan coach **TAKESHI OKADA** took charge of Chinese Super League side Hangzhou Greentown.

Off to China...Okada

Sanfrecce Hiroshima coach **MIHAILO PETROVIC** took charge of J.League rivals Urawa Red Diamonds.

Former Ipswich Town and QPR boss **JIM MAGILTON** was named as coach of A-League side Melbourne Victory until the end of the current season.

EUROPE

Manchester United midfielder and Scotland captain **DARREN FLETCHER** will miss the rest of the season and faces a battle to save his career after the 27-year-old was confirmed to be suffering from ulcerative colitis, a debilitating bowel condition which can lead to severe complications and potential steroid treatment.

NEIL WARNOCK was sacked as manager of Premier League side Queens Park Rangers after leading the club to promotion last summer.

Danish champions Copenhagen parted company with coach **ROLAND NILSSON** – who led Malmo to the Swedish league title last term – halfway through his first season with the club.

The Bundesliga's bottom club Freiburg sacked coach **MARCUS SONG** after the team collected just 13 points from 17 games this season.

PSV Eindhoven coach **FRED RUTTEN** will leave the Dutch club at the end of the season, explaining: "It's time PSV and I let one another go."

Georgia captain **KAKHA KALADZE** announced his retirement from international football. The 33-year-old ex-Milan defender, who now plays for Genoa in Serie A, won 84 caps for his country and wore the skipper's armband 50 times.

FRANCO FODA will leave defending Austrian champions Sturm Graz at the end of the season. The German, who has been coach at the club since 2006, also led the side to the Austrian Cup in 2010.

Off soon...Rutten

Scotland striker **KRIS BOYD** terminated his contract with Turkish side Eskisehirspor after a row over unpaid wages.

SOUTH AMERICA

Palmeiras' former Brazil goalkeeper **MARCOS**, who played in the 2002 World Cup-winning side, has retired.

AFRICA

Tunisian club Sfaxien sacked German coach **REINHARD STUMPF** after just four months in charge.

ASIA

Vissel Kobe centre-back and former Japan captain **TSUNEYASU MIYAMOTO** announced his retirement.

German coach **FALKO GOTZ** was sacked by Vietnam after the under-23 side failed at the Southeast Asian Games.

OUT

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Lazaroni sacked by Qatar

World Cup 2022 hosts Qatar dismissed Brazilian coach **SEBASTIAO LAZARONI** after just four months in charge after the team's failure to progress beyond the group stage in December's Pan Arab Games.

Lazaroni, who coached Brazil at the 1990 World Cup, was Qatar's third coach of 2011.

Gone in four months...Lazaroni

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Case in point...a Manchester City fan responds to the FIFA president

Hypocrisy clouds Terry and Suarez racism cases

Hard cases make bad law, it is said, and the cases of Luis Suarez and John Terry seem to fall into that category.

The Terry case drags on. He has been charged by the Metropolitan Police rather than, in the instance of Suarez, the FA. Whatever one may think of Terry, with his chequered record as a person rather than a player, his insistence that the torrent of racist abuse he confessed to have emitted may or may not, as he said, have been directed into the void. We do know that its alleged recipient, Queens Park Rangers defender Anton Ferdinand, didn't hear it.

By contrast, Manchester United's Patrice Evra certainly heard Suarez call him "*un negrito*", meaning, alas, little negro. But does the consequent punishment fit the crime? Rash and irresponsible as it was for Kenny Dalglish to dress his players and himself in T-shirts supporting Suarez, there remains about the sentence a whiff of "exemplary" rather than measured justice. To their credit, Chelsea refused to allow their players to wear similar T-shirts in support of Terry, though their impulsive and voluble young manager, Andre Villas-Boas, hardly distinguished himself with his vehement defence of his player.

Off the field, Terry has all too abundant "form": mocking grieving Americans at London airport at the time of the 9/11 atrocity, urinating in a glass in a London nightclub and demanding large sums of money, hugely paid though he be, for showing fans round the Cobham training ground. His bitter relations with Wayne Bridge, with whose former girlfriend he had an affair are, perhaps, in a different category, given that word "former".

> There remains about Suarez's sentence a whiff of "exemplary" rather than measured justice

As for Suarez, as an Ajax player he once actually bit an opponent. He punched the ball off the Uruguay line in the last World Cup and then, duly sent off, exulted on the sidelines when Ghana missed the resulting penalty. He also gave Fulham fans at Craven Cottage a one-finger salute.

Yet over such cases, it seems to me, hangs the noxious cloud of political correctness, that essence of hypocrisy and petty interference. My long-time friend Paul Davis, once such a fine playmaker with Arsenal, put things into perspective when, in print, he recalled his experience as a young player there, subject to constant racist jibes, even from his own team-mates.

How well one remembers the endemic racism in English football some years ago, when the bias against black players was almost pathological. It's splendid that things have greatly changed, but could the pendulum have swung too far? Especially when you consider attitudes elsewhere, even – or perhaps unsurprisingly – from the ineffable Sepp Blatter, who vacuously declared that when there was a racist confrontation between two players in a game, they should simply shake hands afterwards and forget about it.

All of a piece, one supposes, with FIFA's own negligent and duplicitous attitude to racism.

Emblematic for me, during the 2006 World Cup in Germany, was when Ukraine and their opponents lined up before a game to pledge their opposition to racism. At the end of the Ukrainian line, seemingly unembarrassed, stood their manager and former star Oleg Blokhin who, only some weeks earlier, had emitted a torrent of bigotry against

black players hired by Ukrainian clubs.

And how to reconcile the deeply dubious award of the 2018 World Cup to Russia, whose football is permeated with racism? Note the case of Nigerian striker Peter Odemwingie, now shining with West Bromwich Albion after being forced out of Lokomotiv Moscow by repellently bigoted fans who, when he had gone, celebrated with a jeering banner which included the image of a banana, with thanks expressed to Albion. When Holland's Dick Advocaat managed Zenit St Petersburg, he admits that he dared not sign a black player.

As I have mentioned in these pages before, I was years ago the first football correspondent to oppose racist prejudice and had the great satisfaction of seeing a short story I wrote, *Black Magic*, satirising such prejudice, appear not only in the old *Evening News* but in the West Indian magazine *The Voice*. I even received a death threat from some wretched little neo-fascist organisation.

Yet as again readers may recall, when, in an interview with some tetchy old crustacean on Irish radio, I sympathised with those young black stars, sons of single-parent mothers, denied personal care as children, a torrent of political correctness rained on me. An Irish newspaper, which I described in print as a putrescent backwater, accused me of being in favour of corporal punishment and the death penalty – both of which I detest – and declared my voice to be "both clipped and plummy".

Pretty rich for the son of a Dubliner who never lost his strong brogue, and who, during The Troubles, hid people from the notorious Black and Tans. But so it goes on and doubtless will in England. Would that other countries took racism half as seriously, if not politically correctly.

Arsenal's debt to Henry Norris

It was pleasing, watching Arsenal's tastefully inventive celebration of their 125th anniversary before the recent Everton game at The Emirates, to see the name of Henry Norris circle the lower part of the stands, with that of other luminaries. Other than myself, I wonder how many others in the 60,000 plus crowd had any idea of who he was? Yet it is arguable that without Sir Henry Norris MP, as he became, Arsenal as they are today might never have existed, indeed might never have existed at all.

In the first instance, Norris himself would have been to blame. The wealthy Fulham properly developer, actually wanted to merge the old Woolwich Arsenal with Fulham, but the FA wouldn't have it, so he took the Gunners across the Thames from Plumstead to Highbury. During the lean years of the Great War, his money kept them afloat.

The Norris legacy...Arsenal celebrate their 125th anniversary

When the war was over, in 1919, Norris connived with "Honest John" McKenna, Football League president and chairman of Liverpool, to cheat Tottenham Hotspur, who should have stayed in the enlarged First Division, and have Arsenal promoted, though they had finished only fifth in the last pre-war Second Division.

Norris reduced his first Arsenal manager Leslie Knighton – a splendid finder of talent – into glum silence before sacking him and bringing in the magisterial Herbert Chapman.

> Without Norris, the Arsenal as they are today might never have existed, indeed might never have existed at all

It ended in ignominy when, fighting an FA disqualification in court, it emerged that Norris had sold the club's motor coach for £300 (big money at the time), signed Chapman's name on the cheque and put it in his wife's account!

It would still be worth putting up at least a bust of him at The Emirates. And also, surely, of Alex James, schemer supreme, the most significant player in Arsenal's history and the fulcrum of their pre-war success.

Christmas produces surprise gifts

The charm of football or, if you prefer it, the sheer confusing essence of football, is its utter unpredictability. The Christmas and New Year period was profuse with examples. Thus, at Stamford Bridge, one was astonished to see an Aston Villa side, lying 12th in the table at the time, give away a first-half penalty goal then proceed to take Chelsea apart.

Chelsea's defence was an utter disaster, guilty of errors which would have shamed any schoolboy. Four times at least Villa had clear scoring chances presented to them by defenders conspicuous by their absence. In the first instance, only a fine save by Petr Cech got them off the hook, but three later occasions they would be punished for their astoundingly slack marking.

More surprising still perhaps was the surrender of Wayne Rooney-less Manchester United at Old Trafford to Blackburn Rovers, then bottom of the table even though Rovers had just drawn impressively at Anfield with Liverpool. Yes, United were without several other key players, but Rovers, with nothing like the same cornucopia of talent to draw on, were without their £8million-rated young Canadian attacker Junior Hoilett.

Blackburn surpassed themselves with a victory which seemed until so near the end to have escaped them, but what happened next? Defeat at home by Stoke City, hardly the most potent of away teams, with Peter Crouch scoring twice, taking him to a century of goals. WS

Shock...Grant Hanley (left) heads Blackburn's winner at Old Trafford

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How does sex affect player performance? Paul Gardner tries to separate the fact from the fiction

Before leaving for Germany to take part in the 1974 World Cup, the Brazil squad spent nearly a month in the mountains outside Rio de Janeiro, isolated from their families and friends, and pretty well sealed off from the outside world.

Occasional visiting hours were allowed to journalists, to whom centre-back Luis Perreira complained: "This is supposed to make us world champions. Of what? Masturbation?"

Which neatly sums up football's "sex problem". When teams are on the road, or taking part in lengthy tournaments, just what are these, super-fit active and pretty randy young men supposed to do about sex?

Should the WAGS (wives and girlfriends) travel with the teams? If not, should players be allowed to bring girls back to the hotels or camps? If none of that is permissible, will the team authorities be willing to turn a blind eye to the inevitable "escapes" from the camp, and the curfew violations?

And if none of that is acceptable, then is masturbation the answer for sex-starved footballers? (At least, as the playwright said, you don't have to look your best).

Of course, things have advanced since 1974. In that same World Cup, Holland startled everyone by allowing wives into their camp. A good idea? Maybe not, they lost the Final to West Germany, who were far more stiff-necked about the idea of conjugal visits.

Behind all this nervousness lies the suspicion that sexual activity adversely affects athletic performance. But it is nothing more than a suspicion because no convincing evidence has ever been advanced to prove the point.

Yet the suspicion lives on. Even after centuries of tangled discussions, the arguments, purges, fears, witch-hunts and, more lately, scientific research have led us to believe – more or less – that sex is good for you (and when I say "us", I mean so-called western society).

Don't be scared

At least we can now state that sex is nothing to be afraid of. Well, not quite. That old notion, that having sex somehow drains the body of strength, is still around and retains a certain credibility in sports.

Perreira's quip about masturbation is a good starting point because masturbation has born the brunt of society's assault on sexual activity.

Attacking the real sexual act – I shall call it "coitus", a word of six-letters instead of the usual four – was always a tricky business, given its central role in the survival of the species, although the church would always try to stress that it was sinful to actually enjoy the act. But the critics could really go to town on masturbation, and it was this matter of the "loss of precious bodily fluids" – the seed – that horrified them. The onslaught on masturbation began around 1780 and has endured to some ever since.

Listen to these post-ejaculation tidings. "In the morning you feel slack, perhaps with a slight headache. That is because the seed comes from near the backbone" and the loss of this seed leads to "finally paralysis and softening of the brain".

> That old notion, that sex drains the body of strength is still around and retains a certain credibility in sports

"It's not the sex the night before, it's the staying up all night looking for it"

Those are not the words of a fire-and-brimstone preacher or a quack trying to sell a cure. They come from a well-educated father writing to his young son in 1914: Arthur Waugh to 16-year-old Alec, the older brother of novelist Evelyn Waugh. There is more of this medical pseudo-evidence in the letter, all "absolutely true" says Waugh Senior, but all of it worthless scaremongering without a shred of real evidence to support it. It really was a case of "these are the opinions on which I base my facts".

While masturbation was being so frantically condemned, coitus was being decked with imaginary and fanciful benefits. It was claimed to be much less harmful than masturbation because the loss of fluids was compensated by "the absorption of an invisible dew which escapes abundantly from the pores of the beloved object". Later, it was held that "during normal coition, a magnetic compensation occurs between the man and the woman".

One part of semen was alleged to be worth 40 parts of blood – a piece of hokum that prevailed for the best part of two centuries.

Actually, the idea of semen as a uniquely precious liquid goes back to Galen (129-200 AD), the Greek-born Roman physician whose theories dominated the medical scene for an incredible 1,000-year-plus period.

Galen has some claim to having been the first sports doctor – many of his patients were gladiators – but he was no friend of athletes, writing "their life is thus like that of pigs – except that pigs do not over-exert or force-feed themselves". But the biggest problem with athletes, said Galen, was that they did the very opposite of what Hippocrates (the father of modern medicine) had advocated, back in 400BC, for a healthy life: "Moderation in all things – labour, food, drink, sleep...and sex."

It wasn't until the arrival of Freud and the birth of the psychological and psychiatric disciplines in the late-19th century that the widely held view of sex as a harmful activity was first questioned on a large scale.

We now have scientists who specifically study sexual activity, even some who specialise in its relationship to sports. A lot of tests have been done, on all sorts of athletes, from footballers to marathon runners. And most of these studies – all of the ones that I have read – have failed to find any evidence that

Hard times...Luis Perreira (left) had his ardour quelled by a sex-ban on the 1974 Brazil World Cup squad

APPLIANCE OF SCIENCE: EXPERTS FAIL TO AGREE

Emmanuele Jannini, professor of endocrinology at the University of L'Aquila in Italy rejects the traditional idea that ejaculation draws testosterone out of the body. "This really is the wrong idea," he says. Instead, sex stimulates production of testosterone.

In 2006, *New Scientist* magazine published an Italian survey which concluded that levels of the male hormone, testosterone, rose markedly after sex and that it was therefore a form of natural doping.

But other scientists argue that sex has no effect on performance.

Dr Frank Sommer, a sports scientist at Hamburg-Eppendorf University-Clinic, says: "All the studies I've seen show that even if a player has sex between four and six hours before kick-off, he should see no difference in his performance on the field of play."

A team from the University of New Orleans looked at the performance of marathon runners who had been sexually active and found that intercourse had neither a positive or negative effect on performance. Their conclusion was that sex doesn't seem to exhaust physically, but then it doesn't strengthen either.

The greater effect may be psychological. Bruno Fabbri, head of the Italian Olympic sports medicine centre in Padova, argues that sex bans are counter-productive, claiming that it is ill-advised to make sportsmen change their sexual habits.

Jean-Marcel Ferret, the former doctor of France's national team, believes it's all a matter of an individual player's pre-match rituals. "If sex on the eve of a game makes him feel better about himself, let him go ahead."

Dr Francesca Romana Tiberi, an Italian expert on sexual practices, adds: "Sex can work to reduce anxiety, both on a physical level and psychologically. Sensible sexual activity helps the athlete counter pre-competition stress and to approach his sporting commitments in a more lucid and functional w-ay."

Jannini believes that it all depends on the sport played and the individual.

"Sexual activity does relax those who do it," he says. "But in sports which require particularly good concentration, a night of sex may not be advisable."

Which suggests that goalkeepers may be different, after all.

No harm...France's team doctor Ferret

sex damages sporting performance. Ian Shrier, sports medicine specialist at McGill University in Canada, is adamant on that point, stating: "The idea that sex can make an athlete tired and weak the next day has been disproved."

The chemistry of coitus has been analysed. It seems that, far from the act depriving the body of vital fluids, it actually increases the amount of testosterone in the blood. Testosterone - the he-man anabolic steroid that heightens aggressiveness. But as testosterone is on the banned-drugs list, that seems to make coitus a means of auto-doping; an activity that enhances performance, then, rather than sabotages it.

Moments of euphoria

In addition to testosterone, there are the endorphins, substances secreted into the brain during various types of physical activity, including running and sex. They produce euphoria, which sounds right for coitus, but are also believed to be a main contributor to an athletic phenomenon, the state known as "runner's high", in which a runner (or any athlete) is able to continue running beyond his normal pain-threshold. Again, a performance-enhancing effect.

But if you think that all this science has ended the debate, think again.

For a start, most of the research has involved small groups of athletes, too small for any abiding conclusions to be drawn, or it has been performed on animals, with results that may not apply to humans. Furthermore, there are conflicting results. For example, while many studies claim to have shown a rise in testosterone blood levels during sex, Dr Chris Goosens, doctor of the Belgian club Beveren, gave treadmill tests to a dozen players, some who had just had sex and others who had abstained. He found no link between testosterone levels and sexual activity.

> A lot of tests have been done on athletes and all have failed to find any evidence that sex damages sporting performance

Above all, there does seem to be a genuine fear among some athletes that coitus is a peculiarly strength-sapping activity. Call it a superstition if you like, but it is a curiously persistent one. It survives strongly, despite research that claims to have shown that the average sexual act between husband and wife burns up only between 20 and 50 calories – the energy needed to climb just two flights of stairs.

Box clever

Boxing, an activity in which strength, power and stamina are everything, has a long history of anti-coital training methods. Both Rocky Graziano and Muhammad Ali abstained from sex for up to two months before fights. Manny Pacquiao, the current WBO welterweight champion has stated publicly that he separates himself from his wife when he trains for a fight.

So although the scientific evidence suggests that there really is no problem to be faced up to, this still has not silenced the doubters.

Anecdotal evidence is plentiful, most of it endorsing sexual activity as harmless, some of it insisting that it amplifies performance. But all of it is suspect, much of it inevitably coming over as the tall tales of sexual braggarts.

"Sex was my pre-match training," said the former Scottish international Frank McAvennie. His team-mate

Graeme Souness said: "I've had enjoyable nights and mornings before a game and it never affected me."

Paolo Pulici who topped the Serie A goalscoring chart three times while playing for Torino in the 1970s, was notorious for boasting to his team-mates about his Sunday morning, pre-game trysts, while Brazil striker Romario seemed pretty sure of himself when he once proclaimed: "Good attackers score more goals when they have made love on the eve of a match."

Romario was a member of Brazil's 1994 World Cup-winning side, but that was a team that coach Carlos Alberto Parreira kept strictly confined to camp, apart from organised excursions. Wives were not allowed in, but players were given time off to be with them outside the camp: "That was when I conceived my son," claimed Branco. But there was an iron 11pm evening curfew throughout – even after the Final win.

When Parreira returned as coach for the 2006 World Cup, he brought a more relaxed approach...and Brazil were knocked out in the quarter-finals.

Change of heart... Hodgson relaxed his sex ban on the 1994 Switzerland World Cup squad

> "Women in football are a scourge. They do not understand that men have a hard job to do"
>
> Josef Sabo, former Dynamo Kiev coach

The change in Parreira's approach reflects changing attitudes in society. Few of today's coaches would seek to enforce a strict sex ban because not many people now believe – or would be willing to admit that they believe – the tales of vital bodily fluids ebbing away.

Roy Hodgson did announce a sex ban for his Switzerland team for the 1994 World Cup, but by the time they arrived in the USA for the competition the order had been relaxed. Even Berti Vogts, known as a hard-nosed defender, has liberal views on the matter, vowing that: "The players can get up to whatever they like. The only occasion I draw the line is at half-time."

The problem has another aspect, one that baseball manager Casey Stengel voiced years ago: "It's not the sex the night before that's the problem, it's the staying up all night looking for it." But this might be expected to be solved by the now common practice of inviting the WAGS into the camps, or at least having them stay nearby.

Make goals, not love

However, the reports suggesting that sex is not good for footballers are still coming in. Sometimes they sound almost apologetic, as when, in March 2011, coach Pedro Troglio explained why his Argentinos Juniors were getting good results: "If they do their homework, they can cope. They eat well and don't make love much."

And sometimes the strong voice of an old-time authoritarian can still be heard. After Dynamo Kiev got off to a particularly awful start to the 2007 season, coach Josef Sabo ordered his team to a remote training base, blaming the WAGS for poor results. Said Sabo: "We went to the base, because women in football are a scourge. They do not understand that men need to work, that they have a hard job to do."

When the theories are unconvincing, when the science is inconclusive, when the anecdotes are infantile and the superstitions are unbelievable, it's OK to seek help from 2,400 years ago.

Hippocrates' "moderation in all things" still shines through brightly. WS

Goal power... Brazil's Romario (right, with Branco) was keen to score on and off the pitch

COACHES BEG TO DIFFER

Increasingly, coaches do not attempt to control their players' sex lives. Republic of Ireland coach Giovanni Trapattoni remains of the old school, though. "I've had my share of pre-match camps as both a player and coach," he says. "I know how players think and in delicate matters such as this, there has to be rules. "

In contrast, at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, Argentina coach Diego Maradona had no problem with his players having sex as long as they were in a "stable relationship". As a player Maradona was reported to need sex every day. Otherwise, he claimed, he would suffer headaches.

Ukraine coach Oleg Blokhin attempted to use sex as a motivating tool at the 2006 World Cup, promising the end of abstinence if his side reached the semi-finals.

His policy, however, appears to have backfired. Ukraine went out at the quarter-final stage, enabling the players to spend time with their wives even earlier.

Daily requirement...Maradona (pictured with his wife in 2000) believes regular sex can help performance

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SID LOWE
in Madrid

Best of the best – discuss

Just how good are Pep Guardiola's Barcelona?

They say "if you can't beat them, join them", and there was no way that he could beat them. That, at least, was the conclusion drawn in Japan. So, when the final whistle went on the Club World Cup, Neymar approached the Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola, congratulated him and then whispered in his ear, like a seductive silver screen heroine: "Take me with you."

Maybe one day – but right now it would be tempting to reply: "What for?"

Barcelona destroyed Santos in the Final to claim their second world title in three years. The game had been billed not just as Santos versus Barcelona but Neymar versus Leo Messi. Pele had declared the Brazilian better than the Argentinian, and yet, perhaps predictably, there had been no competition. Neymar had been eclipsed; much as Cristiano Ronaldo had been eclipsed in the *clasico* days before.

We should have learnt not to take too much notice of what Pele says by now; instead we should have listened to Xavi, the Barcelona midfielder who insisted that he does not even want to compare Messi to anyone else in the world "because it is not fair on them". Xavi is biased, of course, but he is also right.

It is not that Neymar is a bad player – he clearly is not, and Guardiola later admitted to tailoring their approach to preventing him getting possession – but Messi appears untouchable right now. As do Barcelona. Neymar barely saw the ball. When he did have a chance, goalkeeper Victor Valdes snuffed it out. Guardiola had looked for a way of "preventing them from connecting with the striker" because, he said, "if they did that, I knew we would struggle". Once again, they did not.

While Neymar was unable to make an impact, Messi was astonishing. He scored twice – the first and the last, goals of such softness of touch, such precision; goals that meant he has now equalled Pedro's 2009 record by scoring in all six competitions in a calendar year. It was another goal in a Final, too, having scored in the last two Champions Leagues and the Spanish Cup, plus the Spanish and UEFA Super Cups. Although he did not score, a few days before he had led Barcelona to a 3-1 win over Real Madrid.

It's not just Messi

The debate with Messi now is not whether he is the best in the world but where he stands on a ranking of the best in history. After this game, a similar debate was being held about Barcelona. After all, it was not just about Messi. As the front cover of *Marca* put it, playing on Barcelona's famous motto *"mes que un club"* (more than a club), Barcelona are "more than Messi".

Barca have now won 13 of 16 possible trophies under Guardiola. But it is not just about that. in Japan, it was not even about the 4-0 scoreline or the fact that they have now won two Club World Cups in three years, to go with two European Cups and three league titles. It was about the way that Barcelona did it – what sticks in the mind is not the trophy, it is the play.

Inevitably, there were those that insisted that Santos were not a good side; that Barcelona had it easy. It was a familiar argument – and, in a sense, that is the true measure of both Barcelona's and Messi's success. Sure, the gigantic goal tallies totted up can be questioned, the quality of the opposition picked at. Sure, Santos looked like a poor team. But so had Madrid. The team that one coach described as "alarmingly good", a pack of "beasts" had been reduced to a wreck, chasing the ball in vain. Madrid looked like a poor team against Barcelona, just as Santos did, just as Manchester United had done. Twice. Guardiola has outfought Jose Mourinho, Arsene Wenger and Alex Ferguson; Messi has outplayed Ronaldo and Neymar. It is not coincidence.

It can be hard to accept that but sometimes there is no other choice. "This was a lesson," Neymar said. "What we have to do now is learn from this – learn how to play football from them.

Messi the magnificent...the Barcelona star, at his impish best, beats Santos captain Edu Dracena to fire in a shot during the Club World Cup Final

GUARDIOLA'S REMARKABLE HAUL OF TROPHIES AS BARCELONA COACH

Since his appointment in 2008, Guardiola has won 13 of the 16 trophies he has competed for

2009	2010	2011
Spanish League	Spanish League	Spanish League
Spanish Cup	Spanish Super Cup	Spanish Super Cup
Spanish Super Cup		Champions League
Champions League		UEFA Super Cup
UEFA Super Cup		Club World Cup
Club World Cup		

Barcelona are a machine, I saw the best players in the world today: Messi and Xavi." Team-mate Ganso added: "You can't play if you haven't got the ball and getting it off this lot is almost impossible."

"New formation"

According to Santos coach Muricy Ramalho, Guardiola had "invented a new formation", playing 3-7-0, flooding the midfield and keeping the ball. Everyone attacked, everyone defended. Everyone played. Barcelona scored four, hit the woodwork twice and drew a series of saves from Rafael Cabral. In the first half they had 75 per cent of the possession. Seventy-five per cent. In the Final of the Club World Cup.

Xavi's assist for the first was preceded by a gorgeous piece of control with his heel. He ended the match just one club trophy behind Paco Gento's all-time record. That was fitting; Xavi is the ideologue and he had once again dominated the game. Here was another demonstration of what Guardiola had been getting at with the wonderfully simplistic, almost hypnotic phrase, he had used after the *clasico* days before: "I get the ball, I pass the ball; I get the ball, I pass the ball; I get the ball, I pass the ball."

According to the sports newspaper *AS* – proud of its pro-Real Madrid stance – this was an "exhibition of tiqui-taca". Their front cover led on: "*esos locos bajitos*" – those crazy little guys. As Santi Gimenez wrote, Barcelona's authority was "insulting". There was, he noted, a moment when a player went down and Santos players formed a huddle. The question was obvious: "How the hell do we stop this lot?" The answer was equally clear – you don't.

> After the Final Neymar whispered to Guardiola: "Take me with you." It would be tempting to reply: "What for?"

This was Barcelona winning the way that Barcelona do; the culmination of their work over the last three years – and beyond. The Final of the Club World Cup ended up being the perfect embodiment of their philosophy – one of these days Guardiola is going to send out a team made up entirely of midfielders – and that was reflected in the starting XI: nine had come through Barcelona's youth system at one stage of another. Few teams, if any, have had such a clearly definable identity as this Barcelona team. It is a philosophy that *El Pais* called "counter-cultural" and "a Quixotic approach that captivates even more than the trophy haul".

Certainly, few teams have been as good. This victory alone may not have meant much but in the context of the previous three years, it did. This was the game that drew comparisons with Hungary at Wembley, Sacchi's Milan, Shankly's Liverpool, and Pele's Brazil. Barca seemed the natural successors to Total Football. In Japan, they were crowned the world's best team. Some wanted to add a solitary word to that title. Ever. **WS**

PADDY AGNEW
in Rome

Reasons to be cheerful

Italian football has cause to be optimistic, despite another scandal

With all due respect to Mark Twain, one has to conclude that reports of the demise of Italian football have been greatly exaggerated. As 2012 cranks into action, Italian football presents a familiar round-up of the good, the bad and the ugly.

The good is the fact that five Italian clubs are still involved in European club competition at the end of an autumn which saw Italy qualify more than comfortably for the Euro 2012 finals in June. The bad and the ugly concern the ongoing *Calcioscommesse*, or so-called "Last Bet" betting scandal, which first made headlines last summer and then resurfaced with a vengeance at the end of December when 17 people, including the former Atalanta captain and Italy midfielder Cristiano Doni, were arrested.

Let us, however, begin with the good news. Somewhat against expectations in this age of English Premier League domination, Italian football goes into the knockout stage of the UEFA Champions League with three representatives, namely Milan, Internazionale and Napoli, drawn respectively against Arsenal, Marseille and Chelsea. What is more, no less authoritative a figure than the new Paris Saint-Germain coach, Carlo Ancelotti, suggests that the good times might continue to roll.

"All three can make it to the quarter-finals, why not?" Ancelotti told *Gazzetta dello Sport*. "For a start, the Italian clubs can be relieved that they managed to avoid Barcelona and Real Madrid. And then, realistically, I ask you, are Arsenal, Chelsea and Marseille better than our three? As an Italian, I would be pretty confident."

Whatever one makes of Ancelotti's pro-Italian optimism, there is no denying the fact that Italian football started the new year in a positive mood, with better Champions League representation than any other of the European superpowers.

Whistle-blower... Gervasoni made startling claims about large-scale match fixing

Furthermore, just to make the point about their ambitions, Napoli landed one of the first major January-window signings when they spent £10million on 22-year-old Chilean striker Eduardo Vargas of Universidad de Chile.

On top of that, there is every reason to believe that both Udinese and Lazio, currently sitting on the heels of Serie A joint-leaders Milan and Juventus, will give a good account of themselves in the Europa League, even if their ties, against PAOK and Atletico Madrid respectively, could not be described as easy.

> Italian football in 2012 presents a familiar round-up of the good, the bad and the ugly

Investigations and arrests

Last year ended, however, with a reminder of off-the-field problems. In a manner similar to the 2006 *Calciopoli* match-fixing scandal, the "Last Bet" expose returned to spoil the party just before Christmas. And as with *Calciopoli*, the basic problem is the slow Italian judicial system. While the football federation's disciplinary bodies were able to deal with both situations fairly promptly, the state judiciary moves much more slowly, and in the process covers much of the same ground.

So it was that Doni and 16 others were arrested in late December.

It had started almost by chance, prompted by concern that someone had attempted to drug a number of players in a Lega Pro (third division) game between Cremonese and Paganese in November 2010. The attempt failed, but it alerted police in Cremona, who later initiated a widespread investigation which led to 16 arrests, including that of former Italy strike Beppe Signori.

The investigation intensified in late December when Cremonese defender Carlo Gervasoni, in a judicial interview, pointed to at least 18 mainly Serie B games between March 2009 and May 2011 where betting syndicates had pulled off match-fixing coups. Gervasoni reportedly was even able to reveal the sums of money involved. For example, he claims that five players received a total of €90,000 (£74,000) to fix Salernitana's 4-2 home win against Albinoleffe in April 2009. Gervasoni was an Albinoleffe player at the time.

For the time being, public prosecutors are investigating at least 37 Serie A and Serie B players (including such as Lazio's Stefano Mauri and Genoa's Marco Rossi), relative to charges of "sporting fraud" in an as yet unknown number of games.

Clearly, this particular investigation is far from over. One way or another, it would seem that Italian football will be making plenty of headlines in 2012. WS

NICK BIDWELL
in Munich

Pole position

It's only half-time but Bayern are well set to reclaim the title

Autumn champions (*Herbstmeister*) for the first time in four years, Bayern Munich headed for the winter break with a spring in their step, a song in their hearts and a three-point lead over closest rivals Borussia Dortmund and Schalke.

Despite their share of off days – succumbing at home to Borussia Monchengladbach and Dortmund, and losing in Hanover and Mainz – more often than not Bayern have swatted the opposition aside. They have swept the board in all the most meaningful Bundesliga categories: tightest defence (breached on only 10 occasions), best attack (43 goals) and most prolific marksman in 16-goal Mario Gomez.

Bayern's sharp-elbowed push to the head of the queue - in stark contrast to their stuttering third-place finish last season - can be attributed to a wide range of factors. These include world-class talent in most areas, game changers in the attacking third (Gomez, Franck Ribery, Arjen Robben and Thomas Muller), big spending on reinforcements last summer (£18million for Schalke goalkeeper Manuel Neuer and £11m on defender Jerome Boateng from Manchester City) plus, of course, influential new coach Jupp Heynckes, now in his third spell at the helm.

Marching on...Bayern celebrate a goal in a 3-0 Bundesliga win against Cologne in December

Tasked with restoring harmony to the dressing room after the frequently stormy stewardship of Louis Van Gaal, and shoring up a back line which had turned dysfunctional, Heynckes has proved worthy on both counts. Thanks to his vast experience and common-sense approach, the Bavarians have become a unit again, striking the right balance between defensive rigour and creative thrust.

> Thanks to Heynckes' common-sense approach, Bayern have become a unit again

Arguably Heynckes' most vital asset is his ability to dampen down the fires which regularly break out in and around Bayern. At a club where every defeat is portrayed in the media as a full-blown crisis, it's vital the coach doesn't panic. "Uncle Jupp" never does, always at pains to keep things in perspective and to quietly correct errors as and when they arise.

History says Bayern will take some dislodging: 14 times out of 16 they have translated pole position at Christmas into end-of-season triumph. Howeber, reigning champions Dortmund will probably fancy their chances of hauling in their southern foes.

After a shaky start, the young guns from the Westfalenstadion ended 2011 unbeaten in 11 games. How they cope with their early Champions League exit – they finished last in their group – could make or break their title challenge. Will it harm morale or will the lack of midweek action prove beneficial to a side not exactly renowned for economy of effort?

Despite losing coach Ralf Rangnick through nervous exhaustion in late September, and with little in the way of squad depth, Schalke have done remarkably well. New boss Huub Stevens, back in the Gelsenkirchen saddle after nine years, has instilled greater solidity, while the strike trio of Raul, Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and Jefferson Farfan have generally wreaked havoc. The bubble may burst, but with Stevens' ability to forge spirit and togetherness, don't underestimate them.

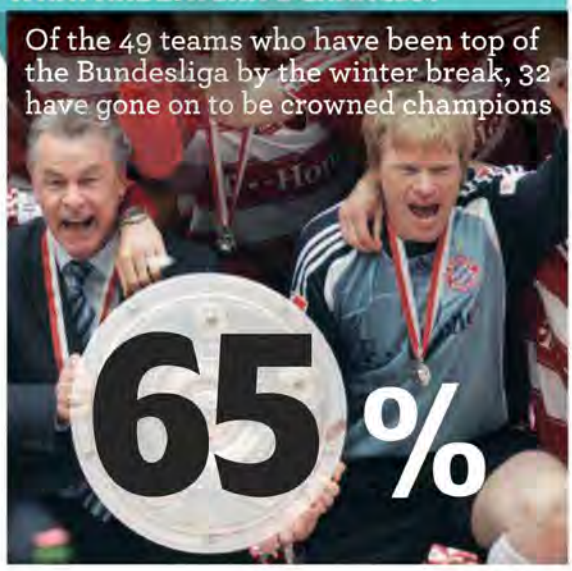
Gladbach have undoubtedly been the surprise packet. Six months after pulling the team away from the relegation precipice, Swiss coach Lucien Favre has them lying fourth and on track for Europe, which every Borussia-Park fan would have deemed pure science fiction 12 months ago. With an average age of only 24, the current crop are fast learners, as outstanding in defensive work as their lightning counters. The only snag has been the speculation over the future of strike starlet Marco Reus.

National champions in 2009, Wolfsburg could end up fighting for their lives. Incredibly, coach Felix Magath went through 30 players in the first half of the season and if this carousel does not stop soon the drop will loom large.

No such worries for Hamburg. Since his autumn appointment ex-Basle boss Thorsten Fink has yet to taste defeat. And while no one in the northern port predicts a return to the European glory days of the 1970s and 80s, they can at least be pleased that the once-stricken patient (one point from the first six games) is out of intensive care. WS

WHAT ARE BAYERN'S CHANCES?

Of the 49 teams who have been top of the Bundesliga by the winter break, 32 have gone on to be crowned champions



KLAAS-JAN DROPPERT
in The Hague

Civil war in Amsterdam

A row over the future direction of Ajax has split the club in two

"They've gone mad," Johan Cruyff concluded when he heard the news. Without informing Holland's greatest player of all time, his fellow Ajax board members had appointed his arch-rival, Louis Van Gaal, as the next CEO of his beloved club.

It was the latest twist in a row which has split the Amsterdam club down the middle. It is a tale of rows, egos, betrayals and secretly taped meetings. All the ingredients would make a brilliant Shakespearian play, but it has been more like a soap opera - and one that could run for many more years.

It all started on September 20 last year when Cruyff used his column in *De Telegraaf*, the Amsterdam newspaper, to slam the club after a poor Champions League display against Real Madrid. Although the scoreline at the Bernabeu was only 2-0, Ajax had been outplayed. The club was making a complete fool of itself in Europe, Cruyff declared, arguing for a fundamental overhaul.

"This isn't Ajax anymore," he wrote. "It is worse than the period before Rinus Michels came in 1965."

The column duly sparked a vicious trench war between pro- and anti-Cruyff factions. His pet gripe has long been that the club's famous youth academy no longer produces skilled, complete footballers. The last world-class striker Ajax produced was Patrick Kluivert, Cruyff argues, more than 15 years ago.

His plan is for former players to take the key positions of coach, technical director and head of the academy. Barcelona, Cruyff's other darling, should be the example. He was a member of the group that supported the candidacy of Joan Laporta, who appointed Txiki Begiristain, and later Andoni Zubizarreta, as director of football.

Cruyff's first victory came at the end of 2010 when Ajax's head coach Martin Jol quit in favour of Frank De Boer and seven former players joined the board. In March, Cruyff proposed that De Boer,

> Ajax is split down the middle. It is a tale of rows, egos, betrayals and secretly taped meetings

Wim Jonk and Dennis Bergkamp form the technical heart of Ajax. Cruyff also argued that academy director Jan Olde Riekerink and several youth coaches should be sacked.

Turn for the worse

At this point, things began to turn nasty. The board refused to fire any youth coaches and chairman Uri Coronel and general director Rick Van den Boog revealed that their meetings with Cruyff had taken place in complete animosity. They leaked Cruyff's demands to the press, including his call for assistant coach Danny Blind to depart.

Coronel also revealed that conversations with the Dutch legend had

Fan power...Cruyff at a meeting of Ajax shareholders in December

been secretly taped, but acknowledged that there could only be one winner in an argument with Cruyff. Coronel and Van den Boog quit as directors, as did Olde Riekerink.

With his rivals gone, the calls for Cruyff to take responsibility increased. However, the Barcelona-based Cruyff has never been keen on official jobs. In fact, he hasn't had one since resigning as Barcelona coach in 1996.

Eventually he agreed to join a "supervisory board", along with new chairman Steven Ten Have, Paul Romer, Marjan Olfers and ex-player Edgar Davids. The four were installed to support Cruyff on non-footballing matters.

It turned out to be a fatal combination. All four opposed his plan to appoint former Ajax player Tscheu La Ling as CEO. Cruyff brought Ling to the next meeting anyway, much to the disgust of the others, who doubted his business acumen and his involvement with Slovakian club Trencin. Ling subsequently threatened to sue Ten Have over accusations that Trencin were involved in bribery.

Marco Van Basten was then considered as a compromise candidate, but Cruyff's insistence that Van Basten should be supported by a committee of his own supporters prompted the former national coach to decline the offer.

Co-operation with Cruyff, the four decided, would be impossible. So they hatched a plan that they knew he would reject. Davids contacted his old mentor Van Gaal, on sabbatical since being sacked by Bayern Munich, and, on November 16, Ten Have announced that Van Gaal was to be the new CEO, with Danny Blind as technical director.

The move was designed to provoke Cruyff, especially as Van Gaal said last year that he would never return to Ajax following a negative experience as technical director, when the board sided against him in a dispute with then-coach Ronald Koeman.

Furthermore, under the terms of his Bayern contract, Van Gaal cannot take up a new job until the summer, making a mockery of Ten Have's claim that the club was in danger and that he had to act immediately.

The appointment of Blind was another controversial choice as Cruyff had labelled the former captain unreliable and said he would never get the position of director of football under him. Not surprisingly, Cruyff was perplexed by the news. "At first I thought it was a joke," he said. "But they have set the club on fire."

Ten Have countered that Cruyff had been invited to the meeting that confirmed Van Gaal's appointment but had preferred to celebrate his daughter's birthday in Barcelona.

From then on, war broke out between the two camps. Davids revealed that during a meeting Cruyff had told him "that he was only on the board because he was black", while female board member Marjan Olfers said that Cruyff made a similar statement about her gender.

SPLIT PERSONALITIES - WHO'S WHO AT AJAX

PRO-CRUYFF

Big ideas...Cruyff

JOHAN CRUYFF
Ajax's greatest player, club icon, with strong opinions on how club can be revived

TSCHEU LA LING
Wanted by Cruyff as Ajax's new CEO

WIM JONK
Brought in as academy director at Cruyff's suggestion

DENNIS BERGKAMP
Brought in as academy coach at Cruyff's suggestion

Academy head...Jonk

Old pal...Bergkamp

ANTI-CRUYFF

LOUIS VAN GAAL
Former coach and technical director, Cruyff's nemesis, approached to be new CEO

ULI CORONEL
Quit as club chairman after fallout with Cruyff

RICK VAN DEN BOOG
Quit as CEO after fallout with Cruyff

JAN OLDE RIEKERINK
Quit as academy director after fallout with Cruyff

STEVEN TEN HAVE
Installed as chairman of new supervisory board, then stood down ahead of new elections

PAUL ROMER, MARJAN OLFERS, EDGAR DAVIDS
Members of supervisory board, then stood down ahead of new elections

DANNY BLIND
Appointed new technical director in a move designed to provoke Cruyff

Foe...Van Gaal

Quit...Coronel

Provocation...Blind

STAYING OUT OF IT

MARCO VAN BASTEN
Former player and coach, declined offer to be new CEO

Legend...Van Basten

Coach...De Boer

FRANK DE BOER
Head coach, has the backing of Cruyff and Van Gaal

Coaching split

Meanwhile, academy director Jonk banned Davids from the club's youth complex and declared that he and his team of coaches would resign if the appointment of Van Gaal went ahead.

Cruyff, Jonk, Bergkamp and 10 other youth coaches, including Jaap Stam and Marc Overmars, now intend to take the matter to court. They claim that the appointment is illegal and against Cruyff's blueprint for the club.

All five supervisory board members have now been asked to step down voluntarily while a new board is elected. That is likely to happen at some point in the coming months at an extraordinary meeting of club members.

Whatever happens, it won't be the end of Cruyff at Ajax and he could still stay as an advisor – his favourite role. So far, Van Gaal has kept quiet, but it is hard to see him willing to work alongside a man with whom he shares a mutual animosity that dates back to his time as Barcelona coach when Cruyff criticised him in the local press.

Club at war...Ajax's Amsterdam Arena is not a happy place right now

Coach Frank de Boer has so far refused to take sides. "It's like choosing between a son and a daughter," he said. "I can't do that and don't want to. I get along with both very well." Although, when he was informed by Ten Have of the decision to hire Van Gaal, De Boer replied: "Be aware that you are going to create an earthquake."

The coach says he supports Cruyff's philosophy that has been introduced at the academy and that Van Gaal should follow suit, commenting: "If the youth coaches leave it will be a disaster."

But right now De Boer has other things on his mind. Ajax began 2012 five points behind leaders AZ and were facing a Europa League tie against Manchester United after being dumped out of the Champions League. That, however, is the subject for another day. WS

VICTOR GUSEV
in Moscow

Anzhi challenge the elite

The big spenders from Dagestan have made the top eight

For the first time ever, the Russian title was not decided in the autumn; instead, reigning champions Zenit St Petersburg were leading the table by six points from CSKA Moscow when the Premier League stopped for a unique winter vacation at the end of November.

The three-month break is part of a transitional 18-month season aimed at bringing Russian football in line with most other top European leagues. The top eight clubs will play each other twice for the 2011-2012 title and European places, while the bottom eight teams battle it out to avoid relegation. Everything restarts on March 3, with the highlight being CSKA's home clash with Zenit.

As well as leading the way domestically, the two main title-challengers have also made it through to the knockout stage of the Champions League, where Zenit will play Benfica and CSKA face Real Madrid. And just to reinforce Russia's growing status in Europe, Lokomotiv Moscow and Rubin Kazan have qualified for the last 32 of the Europa League.

Joining these four in the eight-team domestic elite are Moscow sides Dinamo and Spartak, together with surprise package Kuban Krasnodar - who only rejoined the top flight last season - and big-spending Anzhi Makhachkala.

Anzhi, the club from the southern republic of Dagestan, are aiming to become the biggest force in Russian football and have already spent £60million on some impressive signings, most notably Cameroon international Samuel Eto'o from Internazionale.

After a relatively slow start, new recruits Yuri Zhirkov from Chelsea, Hungary's Balazs Dzsudzsak and Morocco international Mbark Boussoufa have all started to impress alongside new club captain Eto'o and Brazilian World Cup-winner Roberto Carlos, who has also assumed a coaching role at the club.

While they are yet to show the kind of consistency that would make them genuine title contenders, a 2-1 home win against CSKA shortly before the winter break showed that Anzhi's dream of becoming "Russia's Manchester City" may not be as fanciful as many critics suggested. That said, claiming a Europa League berth must be the team's minimum target.

Some still remain to be impressed though. An offer of £160,000 a week could not persuade Peter Odemwingie to join the Makhachkala side. The Russian-Nigerian striker, who is reportedly earning a weekly wage of £35,000 at West Bromwich Albion, said he did not want to return to his mother's native country regardless of the salary.

> A Europa League berth must be the minimum target for Anzhi

Rumours of Guus Hiddink's Russian return never came true, either. Instead, Anzhi agreed a five-year contract with Yuri Krasnozhan, the former Lokomotiv coach who is currently in charge of the national B team.

Moscow challenge

Former Liverpool striker Andriy Voronin helped inspire Dinamo Moscow to a top-three finish at the mid-term break. Sidelined during the regime of Miodrag Bozovic, the 32-year-old Ukrainian enjoyed a resurgence under the attacking style of new coach Sergei Silkin, scoring 11 goals and reigniting hopes of a first league title since 1976 for the Moscow outfit.

Russia's most popular club Spartak Moscow trailed their arch-rivals Dinamo by only one point. The form of Brazilian striker Welliton dipped following public reaction to a clash with Igor Akinfeev which sidelined the CSKA goalkeeper for six months – and earned the league's top goalscorer in 2009 and 2010 a six-game ban. Fortunately, Nigeria international Emmanuel Emenike filled the void, scoring eight times in the last 11 games.

Over at CSKA, Seydou Doumbia topped the goalscoring charts. An impressive return of 24 goals in 30 games put him eight ahead of his nearest rival, Zenit's Alexander Kerzhakov, and the 23-year-old Ivorian underlined his potential by netting five times in the Champions League.

Doumbia's countryman Lacina Traore, bought by Kuban from Romania's CFR Cluj for £4m, scored 15 and was the key to the club reaching the top eight. However, his exploits have not gone unnoticed by the money men of Anzhi, who are reportedly ready to pay for £25m for the 21-year-old. WS

Back to form...Dinamo Moscow's Voronin (right) tackles Aleksander Lukovic of Zenit

RUMEN PAYTASHEV
in Sofia

Revolutionaries from Razgrad

Winter champions Ludogorets are shaking up the Bulgarian league

Traditions run deep in Bulgarian football. Since CSKA were founded in 1948, they and fellow Sofia club Levski have dominated the league, winning the title 52 times between them. Other clubs have triumphed on only 12 occasions.

The most successful team from the provinces has been Litex Lovech. First promoted to the top flight in 1997, they won the championship the following season and have since won three more, including last season's title.

Now Ludogorets, a club from the city of Razgrad, are threatening to repeat Litex's feat. Promoted to the second division in 2010, they went up again to the top tier last year and have now finished the halfway stage of the 2011-12 season as winter champions, ahead of CSKA on goal difference.

Few people took much notice when Ludogorets won their first few games of the new campaign, especially as they were forced to play matches in the coastal city of Kavarna because their stadium in Razgrad was not ready. The Ludogorets Arena was eventually opened by the prime minister, Boyko Borissov, and the BFU president, Borislav Mihaylov, before the game against Levski - and a 2-1 victory that helped establish the new boys as a real force to be reckoned with.

Leading light...former CSKA Sofia midfielder Gargorov (right) has shone for Ludogorets

They went into the winter break in dramatic style, recovering from 2-0 down against CSKA in Sofia to earn a 2-2 draw. Both sides finished with 36 points, but the team from Razgrad have a better goal difference by four.

The coach of Ludogorets is Ivaylo Petev, a former Litex player who was a champion in 1998 and 1999, and a Bulgarian Cup winner in 2001. He has little coaching experience but has built a balanced team with strong tactical discipline and a fast passing game. They play without a typical centre-forward and rely on the midfield for goals.

Plenty of experience

The Ludogorets squad has plenty of experience. Serbian goalkeeper Urosh Golubovich (previously with Lokomotiv Sofia and Litex) was a champion in 2010 and 2011, as was French central defender Alexander Bart.

Defender Yordan Minev is a former CSKA player, as is Emil Gargorov, while Miroslav Ivanov (ex-Levski), Svetoslav Dyakov (Lokomotiv Sofia), Stanislav Genchev (Litex and Vaslui of Romania) and Todor Kolev (Levski and Slavia) are others with top-flight experience.

There are also some decent imports from Brazil in defender Shoko, midfielder Marcelinho and forward Juninho.

However, Ludogorets' success would be impossible without club owner Kiril Domuschiev. Before his investment in Ludogorets, he was a member of the supervising council of CSKA and was well-known as a fan of the Sofia club. However, after the game against CSKA he left no one in any doubt about his feelings, claiming: "The referees made scandalous decisions and cancelled a good goal for our team. Unfortunately there are still a lot of bandits in Bulgarian football."

The emergence of Ludogorets has transformed the landscape of Bulgarian football. CSKA may be level with them at the top, but they are far from a settled side. Milen Radukanov, the coach who won the Cup and Super Cup last season, was sacked despite eight victories in a row and replaced by former player Dimitar Penev.

Levski are three points behind the leaders, but sports director Georgi Ivanov, a former fans' favourite as a player, has struggled in the job. He has pinned his hopes on the appointment of new coach Nikolay Kostov, formerly with Ukrainian side Metalurg Donetsk. Level on points with Levski are Chernomorets, whose coach Dimitar Dimitrov has got his team playing very pleasant football on a tight budget.

What of current champions Litex? After defeats by Levski and CSKA, they languish in seventh place, 11 points off the top. However, owner Grisha Ganchev began 2012 with a powerful counter to accusations that he is being distracted by his many other business interests with the appointment of Hristo Stoichkov as the new head coach. Cup success and European qualification are the two immediate targets for the ex-national team captain and coach. WS

THE MAIN MAN BEHIND LUDOGORETS

Ludogorets owner Kiril Domuschiev is an ambitious businessman who has been dubbed "the Bulgarian Abramovich". The 42-year-old made his money in pharmaceuticals and also has investments in property and construction.

"I am glad that we are playing the best football in Bulgaria," he says. "We have a good youth school with more than 160 children. Some of them will go to the football school of Valencia for teaching. This is the future."

Ambitious...Domuschiev

MICHAEL CHURCH
in Hong Kong

Anelka joins the new money

French forward enjoys pay bonanza financed by Chinese elite

One final, monumental pay day playing for a club little known outside a country that is awash with new money: that is how Nicolas Anelka's switch to Shanghai Shenhua has been viewed by much of the football world.

Certainly his salary - an estimated £8.9million for each of the next two years - makes the 32-year-old one of the highest-paid players on the planet at a time when most of the world is, at best, facing a period of financial uncertainty.

But while Anelka has been criticised in some quarters for effectively bringing an end to his top-class career by chasing the money, in China the ex-Chelsea striker's signing is seen very differently.

With an economy that continues to grow at staggering levels, and with increased confidence in its own national identity, the nation's new super rich – industrialists, property developers and online billionaires among them – are starting to flex their financial muscle.

Former France international Anelka will join another expensively acquired recruit to the Chinese Super League, Argentinian midfielder Dario Conca, who signed for Guangzhou Evergrande midway through last season for £10m from Fluminense.

Like Anelka, the two-time Brazilian league's player of the year is on an astronomical salary. Conca's arrival signalled the seriousness with which Guangzhou owner Xu Jiayin intends to pursue his goal of turning the southern Chinese club into a major Asian force.

Xu, who owns the Evergrande real estate company, took over following a match-fixing scandal that saw Guangzhou relegated at the end of the 2009 season. On doing so he promised to not only rebuild the club but to take it to levels never before witnessed.

National team striker Gao Lin was the first to join the re-configured club, signed from Shanghai Shenhua in early 2010 with Guangzhou still in Chinese football's second tier. Others were soon to follow, and with former Charlton Athletic and Celtic midfielder Zheng Zhi and Sun Xiang, once of PSV Eindhoven, on board up by the end of the season Guangzhou cantered to the title and automatic promotion.

It was to be a similar story in 2011 as Xu gave South Korean coach Lee Jung-soo – a veteran of Chinese football who won the league title back in 2009 with Beijing Guoan – more ammunition with which to claim the club's first title, signing the likes of Yang Hao and former Wigan Athletic midfielder Cho Won-hee before the arrival of Conca and another Brazilian, Muriqui, in August.

As a result, Guangzhou had the domestic championship sewn up by the end of September and eventually finished 15 points clear of Beijing to qualify for the AFC Champions League for the first time.

Meanwhile Anelka, along with compatriot and new coach Jean Tigana, will be expected to give Shenhua a significant boost after a hugely disappointing showing last season, when the former champions finished a lowly 11th in the 16-team league.

But, while Anelka and Conca are unlikely to be the only high-profile foreign stars making their way to the Chinese Super League, the growing influx of money into Chinese football is not only enhancing the clubs in their pursuit of domestic and regional glory.

Football in China is on the verge of becoming much more than just a rich man's plaything; it is increasingly a platform on which to find favour with the country's political elite. Meanwhile, China's struggles on the international stage have not gone unnoticed within the upper echelon of the nation's power structure and a solution is being sought to not only stop the rot, but for the country to belatedly join the international elite.

Right the wrongs

Comments attributed to the country's vice-president Xi Jinping during a trip to South Korea last year sparked a renewed desire to right the wrongs within the country's football infrastructure. Xi, widely tipped as the successor to president Hu Jintao, stated his desire was to see China not only qualify for the World Cup finals, but to also win it as well as hosting it in the future.

His comments sparked renewed interest in the fortunes of Chinese football and they were swiftly followed by the pledging of more than £50m for the development of the game in China over the next three years by Wang Jianlin, owner of the property development group Wanda.

Previously the owner of the Dalian Wanda club when it dominated domestic football, Wang is seeking to play a role in

CHINA'S GROWING POTENTIAL

Expectant...Shanghai Shenua's fans will look to Anelka to help restore the club's fortunes

> "The time was so limited for Camacho and his team" CFA deputy chief Yu Hongchen

increasing the number of youngsters playing the game, which has fallen to pitiful levels.

Corruption and match fixing within the league, plus the national side's poor performance, has seen participation in the sport drop markedly. Some estimates claim as few as 7,000 players under the age of 18 are registered with the Chinese Football Association.

"I have two standards to assess the result of our co-operation," said Wang after signing the contract with the CFA.

"One is the participation level of teenagers in the sport; if China's soccer population increases to 700,000 or 800,000 in three years, then our co-operation will be successful.

"The second standard is the attendance rate at the domestic league. I hope our cooperation will reawaken people's passion for soccer. If we make these changes in three years then we can talk about further co-operation, but if there's no change I think we will be done there."

Negative light

Wang's involvement, though, has already been painted in a negative light as China once again failed to not only to qualify for Brazil 2014 but also to progress to the final phase of Asia's qualifying tournament for the World Cup finals for a demoralising third time in a row.

That was despite the arrival of former Real Madrid and Spain coach Jose Antonio Camacho, who replaced Gao Hongbo at the helm just 10 days before back-to-back qualifiers against Singapore and Jordan.

Under Gao the team had gone on a nine-game unbeaten run following their elimination from January's 2011 Asian Cup in the group stages, but matters were soon to turn sour for Camacho.

Despite winning their opening game of the new era – a nervous 2-1 victory at home to Singapore – the team embarked on a disastrous spell, beginning with a 2-1 loss in Jordan.

New blue...Anelka (right) with Shanghai Shenhua director Zhou Jun

Defeat at the hands of Iraq in Shenzhen left China's qualification hopes hanging by a thread and a loss in the return match in Doha – both defeats coming courtesy of solitary goals by Younus Mahmoud – torpedoed any chance Camacho and his team had of maintaining their World Cup dream.

The Spaniard and his expensively assembled coaching team have so far managed to avoid the worst of the fallout, with most of that directed at Wang and his insistence on replacing Gao so soon before a vital run of matches. Camacho's fate, however, remains in the balance.

"Objectively speaking, the time was so limited for Camacho and his coaching team," said CFA deputy chief Yu Hongchen after the team's second loss to the Zico-coached Iraq.

"Any coach in the world, despite his fame and professionalism, needs at least two years to build a team, before the players can comprehend and display his strategy and philosophy on the pitch." WS

TIM VICKERY
in Rio de Janeiro

Santos taught some painful home truths

Defeat by Barcelona exposed the gap between Europe and Brazil

Floored...Neymar comes off second best against Barcelona's Gerard Pique in the Club World Cup Final

High-profile Santos president Luis Alvaro Ribeiro built up his team's Club World Cup Final against Barcelona as "the classic of the century" and hinted that they might even be favourites. But such considerations were blown aside, joyfully and clinically, in a 4-0 defeat. The first half, especially, was as one-sided as Barca's glorified training exercise of a semi-final stroll against Asian champions Al Sadd – the only difference being that the size of expectation left Santos feeling far sadder. And they were not the only ones.

Brazil's national coach Mano Menezes declared his "sadness for the undoubted superiority of a Spanish team over a Brazilian", but also his hope that "excluding the extremists, the defeat will lead to a deeper and more fruitful discussion about the real problems of Brazilian football".

The extremists he referred to are the hardline nationalists who refuse to accept the spiritual home of the beautiful game has left Brazil, crossed the Atlantic and landed in Catalonia. In the wake of Santos' defeat their number has been reduced. It is striking how quickly and widely the game has been understood as a 90-minute scathing comment on the direction Brazilian football has taken in recent decades.

Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola added motion to the wheel in his post-match press conference. His team passed the ball at speed, he said, "like my dad and my grandfather told me that Brazil did". But certainly not as teams coached by Muricy Ramalho usually go about their business. The Santos boss is the king of the contemporary Brazilian scene, with four league titles in the last six years, normally with a game based on tight defence, set-pieces and counter-attacks. "If you want to see a spectacle," he likes to say, "then go to the theatre."

Or see his team taken apart by Barcelona. Brazilian coaches have argued over recent years that the physical evolution of the game demands six-foot midfielders and makes extended passing moves outdated. Barcelona have been refuting this on a weekly basis, and did so in the most emphatic manner against Ramalho's side. It was impossible to believe the coach had spent six months preparing for this game. There was not the slightest evidence of a strategy and, taken far from his comfort zone, Ramalho looked utterly out of his depth.

> "Without this reality shock we would still be parked on the corner thinking that everything was fine"
>
> Brazilian sports columnist Eduardo Tirone

Barcelona are clearly exceptional. The worrying aspect for Brazilians is that in 2011 their sides performed so poorly against teams from their own continent. Santos won the Libertadores Cup, but they were the only Brazilians to reach the quarter-finals and could easily have fallen with the rest in the second round.

It was a similar story in the Sudamericana Cup. Even allowing for the fact that not all the Brazilians clubs treated it as a top priority, they were disappointing. As in the Libertadores, they consistently struggled against teams following the recent trend for three strikers.

As emblematic as the Barcelona-Santos game was Flamengo's 4-0 home defeat by Universidad de Chile. No Brazilian club came close to the Chileans' attractive, collective, dynamic and aggressive football.

And if the financial gap between European and Brazilian football is narrowing, a chasm is opening up between Brazil and the rest of the continent. It became clear last year that the biggest problems in the Brazilian game are not financial. "Brazilian football has never been so rich in money and poor in quality," wrote columnist Benjamin Back in the sports daily *Lance*.

His colleague Eduardo Tirone welcomed the defeat, commenting: "A Santos win would have hidden the fact that our football is second rate.

"Without this reality shock we would still be parked on the corner, thinking that everything was fine."

Jose Luis Portella referred to the game as "a blessed defeat" which "has opened our eyes and deflated our ego in time for us to put things right before suffering another *Maracanazo*" – a reference to the loss of the 1950 World Cup on home ground.

An optimist might even argue that December 18, 2011 could turn out to be the day Brazil started moving in the right direction on the road to hosting the tournament in 2014. WS

STEVE MENARY

Winners and losers

Their CFU application may have gone missing, but the Caribbean island were spot on in local competition

In the fallout from the bribery scandal that has engulfed the Caribbean Football Union, the CFU has managed to lose a membership application from the Dutch territory of Bonaire, formerly part of the Netherlands Antilles.

In May 2011, Ludwig Balentin, the president of the Federashon Futbol Bonaire (FFB), wrote to the then-CFU president, Jack Warner, requesting membership of the 30-strong regional body. His letter was given to representatives of the Trinidad-based CFU by the president of Curacao's federation, Jean Francisca, but has since disappeared.

The letter, which *World Soccer* has seen, is dated May 24 – a couple of weeks after the infamous meeting in Trinidad when Warner allegedly offered bribes to CFU members, along with Mohamed Bin Hammam.

The CFU is now operating out of Jamaica and general secretary Angenie Kanhai has not seen Bonaire's application. Balentin says: "We intend to join the CFU but we are still waiting for an answer."

Victorious...Bonaire celebrate winning the ABCS Cup

For the FFB, founded in 1960, the problem is frustrating as football in Bonaire is in stasis. When the Netherlands Antilles was dissolved politically, in October 2010, Curacao took over FIFA membership from the Nederlands Antilliaanse Voetbal Unie. Meanwhile Bonaire, with more than 700 registered players and which runs several junior competitions plus a nine-team senior league, must go it alone.

> "We intend to join the CFU but we are still waiting for an answer"
> FFB president Ludwig Balentin

Since Aruba split in the 1980s, players from Curacao dominated the Netherlands Antilles side, but the likes of Errol Sint Jago, Riky Jansen, Rilof Janga, Danielo Trenidad, Igmar Gijsbertha and Rugenio Josephia from Bonaire have all featured.

All three islands play each other and the FFB now wants associate membership of CONCACAF and FIFA. As a special municipality of Holland the latter may be difficult, but Bonaire's footballers have demonstrated their worth by winning the latest ABCS Cup.

The competition features Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao and Surinam, and when it was first staged in 2010 Bonaire finished last, failing to win a game.

With Aruba, Curacao and Surinam falling early in the 2014 World Cup qualifiers, the three FIFA members saw the latest competition in December 2011 as an opportunity to blood new players. Meanwhile, Bonaire's chances were not helped by manager Albert Sint Jago standing down after two years in the job.

League champions SV Juventus, aided by a handful of guest players, were dispatched to represent Bonaire. In the opener they were 1-0 down at half-time to Curacao, but SV Vespo's Andre Piar, along with Kenneth Kunst and Ivanny Calvenhoven, who both play in Curacao for SV Centro, all scored in a shock 3-1 win.

In the Final against Aruba, Bonaire raced into a 2-0 first-half lead with goals from Rolando Jansen of Juventus and Kunst, but Aruba had the better of the second period and drew level. The game went to penalties, and Ashar Bernadus, Jansen, Calvenhoven and Rhendeson Tomasa were on target for Bonaire in a 4-3 win.

"With confidence, good fighting spirit and the will to win, Bonaire were the big surprise," said Surinam manager Kenneth Jaliens. "They had some smart and fast attackers with good individual strength."

Hopefully this could be the start of good times for Bonaire. *World Soccer* has forwarded the membership application to Kanhai at the CFU – and the islanders could prove worthy members. WS

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Bonaire is part of the Leeward Antilles, with Curucao and Aruba, in the Caribbean and is a special municipality of Holland.

Population: 15,800
Size: 113 sq m
Capital: Kralendijk
Language: Dutch, Papiamentu
Religion: Catholic

RWANDA

JAMES MONTAGUE
in Kigali

Wasps on a mission

The national team have become the focal point for the regeneration of a nation

It takes a lot to impress Milutin "Micho" Sredojevic, the coach of Rwanda's national team. As the sun sets over Kigali's Amahoro stadium, with lush green hills rising darkly on the horizon, 500 Rwandans watch in reverential silence as their national team – the *Amavubi* (the wasps) – train for an upcoming 2014 World Cup qualifier against Eritrea.

It is an idyllic scene, more religious festival than training match. Yet Sredojevic stands in the centre circle unmoved, his face like granite, barking orders at his players. A Serbian who has coached top African club sides in Sudan and Ghana, and scouted in 50 of Africa's 56 countries, he has only got to know his players over the past few weeks.

But he has been hired precisely for his military style of management. Time, after all, is a precious commodity when trying achieve something that has never been achieved before: take Rwanda to the World Cup finals.

"Talent is talent no matter in what country in the world," says Sredojevic. "I'm happy we have the talent, but that talent needs strong matches, strong challenges.

"This country had a very painful experience in 1994. Football is a way to heal those wounds that 1994 made. I'm counting myself as a soldier on that road to put the medicine into the healing."

In charge... Sredojevic spends a moment of reflection with his new players

Rwanda's "painful experience" is an inescapable subtext every time the country is mentioned. Most national teams in Africa, like in the Middle East, have had to overcome the political and social realities of war, revolution, instability or corruption to survive. But no country provokes that same powerful imagery quite like Rwanda.

In 1994, some 800,000 people were butchered in just eight months during one of the most brutal orgies of violence since the Holocaust. The Amahoro stadium became a focal point during the violence, an HQ for the overrun UN forces in Rwanda. Under the false mask of protection it had turned into a makeshift refugee camp.

"We were up to 12,000 in here," says Romeo Dallaire, the man in charge of the UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda, when asked about the football stadium in the documentary *Shake Hands With The Devil*.

"All you see is people and clothes, and so the place looks absolutely, totally out of control. It became...something like a concentration camp. We were out there protecting them, but while we were out there, they were inside dying."

When the film was released, its premier was held at the Amahoro. In such a small country the deaths had a devastating impact on every aspect of society. Most of Rwanda's footballers were murdered or simply disappeared, and its league destroyed.

The transformation 17 years on is remarkable. On the surface Rwanda has stability and the rule of law. Policeman hand out parking tickets and the streets are clean and tidy thanks to a law banning the use of plastic bags, designed to protect the country's burgeoning tourism sector. But few talk of the genocide except in euphemistic terms, as if scared to reopen old wounds. Today, large numbers of amputees still move slowly and silently, like ghosts, among the survivors. Under the surface of normality, activists also complain that president Paul Kagame is becoming just another African leader who can't tolerate dissent.

A new generation

But the rebuilding of a nation has also involved the rebuilding of the national football team. The Wasps qualified for their first-ever African Nations Cup in 2004. More significant was Rwanda's appearance at the Under-17 World Cup in Mexico in June last year. It was a watershed moment as the team was made up of players born during or after the troubles – Rwanda's first genuinely post-genocide team.

Celestine Ntagungira, president of the Rwandan Football Federation, was one of Africa's greatest referees and has tasted what it means to be part of the biggest show on earth. He escaped

Rwanda before the genocide and officiated at two World Cup finals, in 2006 and 2010, as well as two African Nations Cup finals. He now sees qualification for the 2014 tournament as the next logical step in Rwanda's sporting rehabilitation.

"For me, being part of the referee team at the World Cup was the top of my career," says Ntagungira. "You see after the genocide we have built another national team, another generation of footballers, coaches, referees. Honestly it's another nation. Everything was new. You can see, football is better than 10 years ago.

"If Rwanda play in the World Cup it's a big achievement. The news won't talk bad things about Rwanda. They will say we have good players, a good team and not mention the genocide. Football can give a good image of our country."

But Sredojevic's campaign didn't get off to the best of starts. It was a short journey to Eritrea but no one knew

Pride...Rwanda captain Karekezi presents his players before the home game against Eritrea

anything about their national team. After all, Eritrea is a country considered to be one of the most isolated, repressive regimes on the planet. Dozens of players have fled while on international duty to avoid national service and pursue a better life. Yet Rwanda still went behind in the first half to Eritrea – a team ranked 190th by FIFA – before equalising in the second half through Elias Uzamukunda, Rwanda's only foreign-based professional who plays for Cannes in France.

Tentative steps

Four days later the Amahoro is almost full for the return match. The vuvuzelas and a full military marching band can be heard in the tunnel as the two teams wait next to each other, nervously anticipating their cue. Sredojevic gives some last-minute instruction to his captain Olivier Karekezi, before they walk out into a riot of noise.

Sredojevic's advice worked. Within three minutes Karekezi had bundled the ball into the net. Two more goals follow, and even a late consolation for Eritrea and a blast of tropical rain can't dampen the spirits of the crowd. Rwanda had taken their first step towards history and a new beginning for football in the country. After the game hundreds of children crowded around the team bus for a chance to touch their heroes, screaming excitedly as the players touch them back. Everyone is happy, except Sredojevic.

> "After the genocide we have built another team, another generation of footballers, coaches, referees"
> Celestine Ntagungira, Rwandan Football Federation president

"I would rate our performance, given the room for improvement, as two out of 10," says the coach of the 4-2 aggregate victory. "I'm entirely not happy."

Later he spas with any Rwandan journalists who dare to question his decisions in the post-match press conference. "You are a very talented guy, give me your phone number so I can send you on some coaching course because it looks like you know this material," he replies caustically to one.

In December Sredojevic proved he knows what he is talking about, taking Rwanda to the Final of the regional CECAFA tournament, only losing to Uganda on penalties. He has six months to prepare for World Cup qualification and has promised to scour professional leagues in Europe and the Americas to hunt for players from Rwanda's diaspora. The Wasps take on Algeria, Mali and Benin in Group H and will begin their campaign with the toughest match of all: away to Algeria, who qualified for the finals in South Africa.

Maybe victory against one of the continent's strongest sides might finally put a smile on Sredojevic's face...but don't bet on it. WS

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And now for something completely different...

The 2012 African Nations Cup finals will feature a number of new teams and has the potential for upsets. Mark Gleeson sets the scene

There was widespread carnage in the qualifiers for the 2012 African Nations Cup as some of the continent's biggest names failed to make the cut – most notably the reigning champions Egypt, who finished bottom of their group.

With Algeria, Cameroon, Nigeria and South Africa also missing out, the 2012 tournament in Equatorial Guinea and Gabon marks what could well herald a significant shift in the balance of power of African football.

Ivory Coast, Ghana, Morocco and Senegal head the list of the 16 qualifiers, although the likes of Guinea, Mali and Zambia will all fancy their chances of upsetting the old order.

The Ivorians will take an experienced and a star-studded squad to the three-week tournament in Bata, Malabo, Franceville and Libreville, but they will also arrive with the knowledge that their golden generation needs to deliver.

They are the highest placed nation in the FIFA rankings (at 16th) and have looked to be the team to beat at the last three Nations Cups, yet a penalty shoot-out defeat in the 2006 Final, followed by two lacklustre quarter-finals points to a failure to deliver on the biggest tournament stages.

For players such as Didier Drogba, Kolo and Yaya Toure, Didier Zokora and Emmanuel Eboue time is running out and this may be their last chance to fulfil their potential at international level.

Ghana are still on something of a high after reaching the World Cup quarter-finals in South Africa but will again be going to a tournament without the presence of the influential Michael Essien – and also face a battle to keep the experienced John Mensah fully fit. Their key man is likely to be Asamoah Gyan although there are also big injury doubts hanging over the mercurial striker in the run-up to the tournament. As a result, much responsibility will lie on the young shoulders of the Ayew brothers.

Senegal, who dismissively dispatched Cameroon in their qualifying group, have a forward line bristling with talent. Mamadou Niang, Moussa Sow and Papiss Cisse all scored freely in the qualifiers and have bounced the Lions of Teranga right

Unbridled joy...ecstatic Niger fans celebrate their country's shock 2-1 victory over South Africa

MATCH SCHEDULE

Group A

JAN 21
Equatorial Guinea v Libya (*Bata*)
Senegal v Zambia (*Bata*)

JAN 25
Libya v Zambia (*Bata*)
Equatorial Guinea v Senegal (*Bata*)

JAN 29
Equatorial Guinea v Zambia (*Malabo*)
Libya v Senegal (*Bata*)

Group B

JAN 22
Ivory Coast v Sudan (*Malabo*)
Burkina Faso v Angola (*Malabo*)

JAN 26
Sudan v Angola (*Malabo*)
Ivory Coast v Burkina Faso (*Malabo*)

JAN 30
Sudan v Burkina Faso (*Bata*)
Ivory Coast v Angola (*Malabo*)

Group C

JAN 23
Gabon v Niger (*Libreville*)
Morocco v Tunisia (*Libreville*)

JAN 27
Niger v Tunisia (*Libreville*)
Gabon v Morocco (*Libreville*)

JAN 31
Gabon v Tunisia (*Franceville*)
Niger v Morocco (*Libreville*)

Group D

JAN 24
Ghana v Botswana (*Franceville*)
Mali v Guinea (*Franceville*)

JAN 28
Botswana v Guinea (*Franceville*)
Ghana v Mali (*Franceville*)

FEB 1
Botswana v Mali (*Libreville*)
Ghana v Guinea (*Franceville*)

Top two in each group qualify for quarter-finals

Quarter-finals

FEB 4
Gp A 1st v Gp B 2nd (*Bata*) (QF1)
Gp B 1st v Gp A 2nd (*Malabo*) (QF2)

FEB 5
Gp C 1st v Gp D 2nd (*Libreville*) (QF3)
Gp D 1st v Gp C 2nd (*Franceville*) (QF4)

Semi-finals

FEB 8
QF1 v QF4 (*Bata*)
QF3 v QF2 (*Libreville*)

3rd-place play-off

FEB 11
(*Malabo*)

Final

FEB 12
(*Libreville*)

Finishing touches...workers install seats at Gabon's new Stade de Franceville, one of four venues for the 2012 tournament

Going wild...Guinea players after a 2-2 draw with Nigeria clinched qualification

Pride of Lions...Morocco put on a colourful show of support for their team

Star of Senegal...Sow

back into the spotlight – drawing comparisons with the 2002 side who made the World Cup quarter-finals and the Final of the African Nations Cup.

Sow was many pundits tip to be 2011 African Footballer of the Year, yet did not even make the final trio of candidates. However, he remains a real threat and will be key to Senegal's hopes.

Morocco coach Eric Gerets has managed to mould together a very competitive line-up, introducing a number of second-generation European-born players. The days of fights between home-based stars and non-Arabic speaking "imports" are now largely a thing of the past and there is a growing expectation that this squad might just have what it takes to land a second African Nations Cup.

Of the other contenders, the unpredictable Guinea have the potential to go all the way – it will just depend on which team turns up on the day.

Twice runners-up, Zambia been consistent qualifiers for the final stages and, with coach Herve Renard back at the helm, they will once again be aiming to go that one step further and claim a first African title. Mali have also gone close at previous tournaments, twice finishing fourth during the 2000s and there is enough potential for them to at least go as far this time around.

Tunisia are the only winners from the previous nine championships to have made it through qualifying. However, their recent form has been unconvincing and they only made it to the finals courtesy of Malawi conceding a 94th-minute equaliser to Chad.

Co-hosts Gabon will be backed by a passionate home support but a patchy recent record suggests they will do well to make it past the group stage. Joining the other co-hosts Equatorial Guinea as debutants in the final stages are Niger and Botswana. Niger came through a tough group which also included Egypt and South Africa thanks to a 100 per cent home record, although their form away from Niamey has been far less impressive.

> 2012 could herald a shift in the balance of power of African football

Botswana lost only once in their five-team group but have had their build-up disrupted by a threatened players' strike over bonus payments.

Making up the finalists are the 2010 hosts Angola, Burkina Faso and the two runners-up in qualifying with the best record: Sudan and Libya – who played all but one game away from home. WS

ANGOLA

Palancas Negras (The Sable Antelopes)

GROUP B SCHEDULE

22.01.12	Burkina Faso
26.01.12	Sudan
30.01.12	Ivory Coast

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Quarter-finalists 2008, 2010

Flying high...Manucho celebrates scoring against Kenya during the qualifiers

Angola's place in the finals was only secured on the last day of qualification when Uganda got stage fright and ceded the group to the *Palancas Negras*, who are now in their fourth successive African Nations Cup finals.

Although the Angolan football federation has perpetual financial worries – despite the state coffers being flush with oil money – little expense will be spared ahead of this year's tournament, and the south African side have a good chance of finishing in the top two of Group B in Malabo and making the last eight for a third time.

Angola have been through four coaches since they hosted the 2010 edition, but Lito Vidigal has now steadied the ship.

After taking over in January 2011 he took a team of home-based players to the Final of the African Nations Championship, a tournament for home-based players only. And that performance has proved the catalyst for a series of improved displays from the senior national side – although, ultimately, it was Uganda's failure at the last hurdle – when they needed to take only one point from their last two games – that opened the door for Angola.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

04.09.10	Uganda (a)	0-3
09.10.10	Guinea-Bissau (h)	1-0
26.03.11	Kenya (a)	1-2
05.06.11	Kenya (h)	1-0
04.09.11	Uganda (h)	2-0
08.10.11	Guinea-Bissau (a)	2-0

GROUP J

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Angola	6	4	0	2	7	5	12
Uganda	6	3	2	1	6	2	11
Kenya	6	2	2	2	4	4	8
G-Bissau	6	1	0	5	2	8	3

TOP SCORER IN QUALIFYING

4 goals Manucho

POPULATION

18.5 million

TACTICS

Angola will play a tightly controlled passing game, with Manucho and Flavio proven scorers at African level.

Steady...Lito

COACH

LITO VIDIGAL

One of five brothers who played professionally in Portugal after their family moved from Angola. Although he was with Belenenses, he chose to play at international level for the country of his birth and represented Angola at the 1998 African Nations Cup. His younger brother, Luis, was a full-back for Portugal at the 2000 European Championship.

KEY PLAYERS

ANDRE MACANGA

Now 33 and playing for Al Jahra in Kuwait, he remains the steely centre of the national side.

DJALMA

Currently Angola's highest-profile export, he was signed this season by Porto from Maritimo but has made few appearances for the Portuguese champions.

High profile...Djalma

Lay-off...Flavio

FLAVIO

Overweight after a long lay-off, he recently joined Lierse from Al Shabab of Saudi Arabia and scored on his Belgian top-flight debut.

Clever...Gilberto

GILBERTO

Tricky left-sided player with bags of experience and talent. Also with Lierse.

MANUCHO

The former Manchester United striker has stagnated since the realisation that he was not going to make it at Old Trafford. Currently with Real Valladolid in Spain, though he has also had loan spells in Turkey.

BOTSWANA

The Zebras

GROUP D SCHEDULE

24.01.12	Ghana
28.01.12	Guinea
01.02.12	Mali

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Never qualified before

Perfect start...Botswana celebrate a shock victory in Tunisia in their opening qualifier

Botswana are one of the many shock packages of the 2012 campaign, romping through qualification in contrast to past performances. In a five-team group with past World Cup finalists Togo and Tunisia, and 2010 African Nations Cup qualifiers Malawi, they had already made sure of their place in this year's finals by the halfway stage, becoming the first team to come through the preliminaries.

The former whipping boys have converted good youth development into success and in the end they lost just one game in Group K. They took momentum from their first qualifier, recording a shock 1-0 win in Tunisia a week before the 2010 World Cup Final – a result that went almost unnoticed amid the build-up to the Spain-Holland game.

Botswana's self-belief grew as the campaign progressed and the results keep going their way. Their post-qualification schedule saw them play two friendlies in west Africa in November, against Niger and Nigeria, in which they managed huge confidence-boosting draws.

The Zebras are now set to play in their first finals in what is the most exciting time in their football history.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

01.07.10	Tunisia (a)	1-0
09.07.10	Chad (h)	1-0
11.08.10	Malawi (a)	1-1
04.09.10	Togo (h)	2-1
17.11.10	Tunisia (h)	1-0
26.03.11	Chad (a)	1-0
05.06.11	Malawi (h)	0-0
04.09.11	Togo (a)	0-1

GROUP K

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Botswana	8	5	2	1	7	3	17
Tunisia	8	4	2	2	14	6	14
Malawi	8	2	6	0	13	8	12
Togo	8	1	3	4	6	10	6
Chad	8	0	3	5	7	20	3

TOP SCORER IN QUALIFYING

5 goals Jerome Ramatlkhwane

POPULATION

2 million

TACTICS

Botswana use the flanks to good effect and have plenty of pace in attack. They can, however, be naive at times.

COACH

Stanley TSHOSANE

Has already written his legacy in Botswana's sporting history by taking the team to the finals, despite contractual problems. A former army officer, he has been a long-term fixture in Botswana football but this is his first international tournament.

Legacy...Tshosane

Dispute...Gabonamong

KEY PLAYERS

Mogogi GABONAMONG

Problems over bonuses meant he missed the first half of the campaign, but he remains vital to the team. Plays for SuperSport United in South Africa.

Modiri MARUMO

Experienced goalkeeper who plays for Bay United in South Africa's second tier.

Phenyo MONGALA

A pacy winger who was a bit-part player for Orlando Pirates as they won last season's South African title.

Pace to burn...Mongala

Jerome RAMATLKHWANE

Five goals in the qualifiers, but has hardly played any club football over the last three seasons because of a contract dispute. Currently with Vasco da Gama in South Africa's second tier.

Goal threat...Ramatlkhwane

Dipsy SELOLWANE

Also with SuperSport United, he played briefly in Europe with Vejle of Denmark, before a couple of years in MLS in the USA.

BURKINA FASO

Les Etalons (The Stallions)

GROUP B SCHEDULE

22.01.12	Angola
26.01.12	Ivory Coast
30.01.12	Sudan

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Fourth place 1998

In front...Abdou Razack Traore (left) outpaces South Africa's Andile Jali during a friendly

Unbeaten in qualifying and clear winners of their group, Burkina Faso's participation in the finals will only be confirmed by the Court for Arbitration in Sport shortly before the tournament gets under way, following a legal challenge by Namibia.

For the past two years coach Paulo Duarte has been trying out uncapped Africans that he knew from their club careers in his native Portugal. One was Cameroon-born defender Herve Zengue, who made his debut against Namibia in March 2010, with the backing of the Burkinabe federation and government, who arranged for the requisite passport. After he played in the return game in Windhoek, Namibia protested against his eligibility. Although they have lost two legal challenges, the situation is only likely to be resolved on the eve of the finals.

Abdou Razack Traore has also switched nationalities in recent months. He joins a squad with no shortage of strike power, with Moumouni Dagano and former Bundesliga forward Aristide Bance also battling for a place in the line-up.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

09.10.10	Gambia (h)	3-1
26.03.11	Namibia (h)	4-0
04.06.11	Namibia (a)	4-1
08.11.11	Gambia (a)	1-1

GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
B'kina Faso	4	3	1	0	12	3	10
Gambia	4	1	1	2	5	6	4
Namibia	4	1	0	3	3	11	3

TOP SCORERS IN QUALIFYING

4 goals	Alain Traore
2 goals	Aristide Bance

POPULATION

15.7 million

TACTICS

Burkina Faso are quick on the counter-attack and have good finishers in the two unrelated Traores, Abdou Razack and Alain.

Ultimatum...Duarte

COACH

Paulo DUARTE

The 42-year-old played and then coached at Uniao Leiria before taking the Burkina Faso job. In 2009 he tried to combine his national job with coaching French club Le Mans, but as they struggled in the relegation zone and the 2010 Nations Cup neared he was given an ultimatum – and he chose the Burkinabe position.

KEY PLAYERS

Charles KABORE

A talented utility player with Marseille in France.

Marseille star...Kabore

Mahamoudou KERE

The Burkinabe captain played for a decade in Belgium before joining Turkish club Konyaspor in 2010. Played in the 2004 and 2010 African Nations Cup finals.

Wing threat...Pitroipa

Jonathan PITROIPA

Plays out wide for French club Rennes, who he joined in 2011 from Hamburg of Germany, but has also been used in the centre of midfield by his country.

Abdou Razack TRAORE

Born in Ivory Coast, he nailed his colours to the mast after making his Burkina Faso debut against Namibia in the qualifiers. Plays for Lechia Gdansk in Poland.

Alain TRAORE

Striker with French club Auxerre, he is a graduate of the Planete Champion academy in Ouagadougou.

Graduate...Alain Traore

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Nzalang Nacional

GROUP A SCHEDULE

21.01.12	Libya
25.01.12	Senegal
29.01.12	Zambia

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Never qualified before

Commitment issues...Balboa had been left out of recent matches by Michel

The competition's co-hosts, and one of three newcomers to the finals stage, Equatorial Guinea's preparations for this year's African Nations Cup were not helped when French coach Henri Michel walked out two weeks before the tournament began.

A country with a clear policy of importing foreign-born players to strengthen the national side, it is now down to a Brazilian, Gilson Paulo, to assemble a team from the assortment of South Americans, Cameroonians, Senegalese and Nigerians who have been given cash and handed passports to play in competitive matches over the years without any consequences, despite clear violations of FIFA statutes.

In October they fielded three Colombians in a friendly against Cameroon, and in November's World Cup qualifiers they fielded an ex-Cameroon international from former African champions TP Mazembe who had never before had anything to do with Equatorial Guinea.

The Confederation of African football has turned a blind eye to nationality issues for years, but CAF could find this tournament overshadowed by controversy if Equatorial Guinea achieve decent results and other nations object to their cheating. However, even with home support and a line-up of mercenaries, do not expect them to make much of an impact.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

Qualified for 2012 as co-hosts

POPULATION

0.7 million.

TACTICS

The first priority will be to find consistency in an ever-changing team. They field a lone striker and three central midfielders.

COACH

GILSON PAULO

A former academy director at Rio de Janeiro club Vasco da Gama, the Brazilian was called in to replace Henri Michel when the Frenchman quit as national team coach during the build-up to the finals. The 62-year-old has also worked at Olara, Bangu and Portuguesa in Brazil. Gilson Paulo took charge of the *Nzalang Nacional* for the first time on January 5, for a friendly match against South Africa in Bata, just six days before having to name his final squad. Michel – who led Ivory Coast to the 2006 Final, where they lost on penalties to Egypt – walked out on Equatorial Guinea after complaining about the poor working conditions and outside influences.

Playing in Oman...Doe

KEY PLAYERS

Javier BALBOA

Former Real Madrid and Benfica player who had been left out of the side following an argument over commitment to the Equatorial Guinea cause. May make a return to action under the new coach.

Lawrence DOE

Liberia-born central defender who was naturalised after two years of club football in Equatorial Guinea but now plays in Oman for Al Shabab.

Narcisse EKANGA

The latest mercenary to play for Equatorial Guinea, the midfielder comes from Cameroon and plays for TP Mazembe Englebert of DR Congo.

Cameroon import...Ekanga

JUVENAL

Spain-born, although his father originally came from Equatorial Guinea, he has played for 14 seasons in Spanish football and is currently with Sabadell.

RANDY

Currently the highest profile player from Equatorial Guinea's diaspora, he has had little playing time in Spain's second division with Las Palmas.

GABON

The Panthers

GROUP C SCHEDULE

23.01.12 Niger
27.01.12 Morocco
31.01.12 Tunisia

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Quarter-finalists 1996

Hot property...Gabon will rely on the pace of Saint-Etienne striker Aubameyang

The co-hosts were at the last African Nations Cup in Angola and thought they had gone through to the last eight after a draw with Cameroon in their last group game in Benguela. However, it turned out they had misunderstood the rules. After finishing in a three-way tie at the top of Group C they suffered the embarrassment of celebrating blissfully only to be hit with the cruel reality that they had been eliminated on head-to-head results once they got back to the dressing room.

Gabon have not played any competitive games since, having qualified automatically as hosts for the 2012 finals and playing a steady diet of friendlies over the last 22 months. A series of mediocre performances brought about a mini-crisis in recent months and coach Gernot Rohr was threatened with the sack before he weathered the storm.

There has been unexpected success for Gabon's under-23 team in qualifying for this year's Olympics, but this has been a double-edge sword because it ramps up already unreasonable expectation on a national team with limited potential.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

Qualified for 2012 as co-hosts

POPULATION

1.5 million

TACTICS

The pace of Aubameyang feeds off the work of the bullying frame of Meye up front, but the defence is prone to mistakes.

French schooled...Rohr

COACH

Gernot ROHR

Born in Germany but schooled in French football, he coached Nantes before taking the Gabon job in May 2010. He has also worked at Tunisian club Etoile Sahel, was in charge of Bordeaux and Nice in France, and enjoyed a playing career at Bordeaux and Bayern Munich among others.

KEY PLAYERS

Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG

A French league regular with Saint-Etienne, who he joined permanently from Milan before the finals. His father is a former captain of Gabon.

Solid...Manga

Saving grace...Ovono

Bruno MANGA

Beefy defender who was once with Bordeaux but failed to make the grade, moving on to Angers and now Lorient.

Eric MOULOUNGUI

Has been converted from a striker to a midfielder, where he now plays for French club Nice.

Didier OVONO

Goalkeeper who has often come to Gabon's rescue. With Le Mans in France.

GHANA

The Black Stars

GROUP D SCHEDULE

24.01.12	Botswana
28.01.12	Mali
01.02.12	Guinea

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Winners 1963, 1965, 1978, 1982

Up with the best...Jordan Ayew (left) holds off Brazil's Hulk during a friendly in London

The Black Stars made African football proud at the last World Cup by reaching the quarter-finals, and they have steered a steady course since South Africa, qualifying for the 2012 African Nations Cup despite two changes of coach.

Although they did stumble early on in their qualifying group, they recovered to finish top and qualify with aplomb, winning away in Sudan in the decisive tie.

Ghana were runners-up at the last African Nations Cup but have not won the tournament since a 17-year-old Abedi Pele emerged as a new star at the 1982 finals in Tripoli. His two sons Andre and Jordan Ayew will play in this tournament and both are currently with Marseille – the team their father won the European Cup with in 1993.

Missing will be the injured Michael Essien and Germany-born Kevin-Prince Boateng, who was happy to play for Ghana at the World Cup but has now retired from international football – the prospect of missing Serie A action for Milan seeming unpalatable.

The Black Stars have won four African Nations Cups and if they take a fifth they will go second on the list of all-time winners behind Egypt.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

05.09.10	Swaziland (a)	3-0
10.10.10	Sudan (h)	0-0
27.03.11	Congo (a)	3-0
03.06.11	Congo (h)	3-1
02.09.11	Swaziland (h)	2-0
08.10.11	Sudan (a)	2-0

GROUP I

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana	6	5	1	0	13	1	16
Sudan	6	4	1	1	8	3	13
Congo	6	2	0	4	5	10	6
Swaziland	6	0	0	6	2	14	0

TOP SCORERS IN QUALIFYING

3 goals	Prince Tagoe
2 goals	Emmanuel Agyemang, Asamoah Gyan

POPULATION

24.2 million

TACTICS

Ghana have an edge in their conditioning and squad depth, and their confidence will be boosted by recent achievements.

Serb influence...Stevanovic

COACH

Goran STEVANOVIC

Took over in February 2011 and is the third successive coach from Serbia at the helm. Former Yugoslavia international who spent most of his playing career at Partizan Belgrade before spells in Spain, Portugal and Greece. He has also coached Partizan.

KEY PLAYERS

Kwadwo ASAMOAH

Udinese midfielder who plays a clever role behind the lead striker.

Second striker...Asamoah

Focal point...Gyan

Andre AYEW

The son of Abedi Pele is growing into a key member of the Ghana side with several useful utility roles. Plays for Marseille.

Asamoah GYAN

The focal point of the team's attack, but a loan move from Sunderland to Al Ain in the United Arab Emirates will not have been good for keeping him sharp.

Experience...Mensah

John MENSAH

Injury has hampered the Lyon defender of late, but he is still an important figure and a tournament regular since 2002.

Isaac VORSAH

Powerful centre-back with Hoffenheim in Germany.

GUINEA

Syli national (National Elephants)

GROUP D SCHEDULE

24.01.12	Mali
28.01.12	Botswana
01.02.12	Ghana

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Runners-up 1976

Shock troops...Guinea look full of purpose before the draw in Abuja that put Nigeria out

Usurping Nigeria in their qualifying group suggests that Guinea could be potential spoilers at this African Nations Cup. They are usually a tricky, unpredictable outfit who have made a habit of punching above their weight, reaching three of the last four tournament quarter-finals.

A last-minute goal from Ibrahima Traore in their final qualifier, away to Nigeria in Abuja, ensured they topped the group and put their hosts out with a rip-roaring 2-2 draw. With four wins and a draw, they are one of only a handful of sides to finish the 2012 qualifying campaign unbeaten.

The current squad is drawn almost exclusively from European clubs, which gives them a competitive edge, but their preparations are often shambolic because of a lack of resources.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

05.09.10	Ethiopia (a)	4-1
10.10.10	Nigeria (h)	1-0
27.03.11	Madagascar (a)	1-1
05.06.11	Madagascar (h)	4-1
04.09.11	Ethiopia (h)	1-0
08.10.11	Nigeria (a)	2-2

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guinea	6	4	2	0	13	5	14
Nigeria	6	3	2	1	12	5	11
Ethiopia	6	2	1	3	8	13	7
Madagascar	6	0	1	5	4	14	1

TOP SCORERS IN QUALIFYING

2 goals Bobo Balde, Ismael Bangoura, Oumar Kalabane

POPULATION

10 million

TACTICS

Guinea's trump card is their ability to swiftly move to the counter-attack.

COACH

Michel DUSSUYER

After being fired for failing to take Benin into the quarter-finals at the last African Nations Cup, he returned to the Guinea job in May 2010, having been in charge in 2004 when they reached the last eight of the tournament in Tunisia. He was assistant to fellow Frenchman Henri Michel when Ivory Coast were runners-up in 2006.

Second spell...Dussuyer

Emirates star... Ismael Bangoura

KEY PLAYERS

Alhassane BANGOURA

A new teenage talent who has broken into the first team with Spain's Rayo Vallecano.

Ismael BANGOURA

Had his best spell at Dynamo Kiev in Ukraine, but has now gone for petro dollars in the United Arab Emirates with Al Nasr.

Kevin CONSTANT

Temperamental France-born midfielder who plays for Genoa in Italy and is a regular in the national team.

Sadio DIALLO

Has taken up a role in the centre of midfield of late. Set to join Rennes from Bastia in the European winter transfer window.

Temperamental...Constant

Ibrahima TRAORE

France-born winger who has played in the Bundesliga for the past four seasons, with Hertha Berlin, Augsburg and now Stuttgart.

IVORY COAST

The Elephants

GROUP B SCHEDULE

22.01.12	Sudan
26.01.12	Burkina Faso
30.01.12	Angola

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Winners 1992

Hands off...Yaya Toure takes on South Africa's Kagisho Dikgacoi (left) and Daylon Claasen

Ivory Coast's star-studded squad will be hoping to capitalise on their quality and experience this time, having been the form team at the last three African Nations Cups only to flounder at the crucial moment.

Eliminated at the first hurdle – admittedly in tough groups – in the last two World Cups, there is little doubt about their ability but the consistency needed during three weeks of rigorous activity looks to have been missing in past tournaments.

Since the 2010 World Cup they have changed coach and won nine games, with one draw and a loss, in a run that included beating Italy away in a friendly. The only loss came in Poland in November 2010, while they were held in Port Elizabeth by South Africa in November.

The draw appears to have handed Didier Drogba and his team-mates an easy group in their 13th finals and they will be looking to match the achievement of 1992 and 2006: reaching the Final.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

04.09.10	Rwanda (h)	3-0
09.10.10	Burundi (a)	1-0
27.03.11	Benin (h)*	2-1
05.06.11	Benin (a)	6-2
03.09.11	Rwanda (a)	5-0
09.10.11	Burundi (h)	2-1

*played at a neutral venue

GROUP H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	6	6	0	0	19	4	18
Rwanda	6	2	0	4	5	15	6
Burundi	6	1	2	3	7	9	5
Benin	6	1	2	3	8	11	5

TOP SCORERS IN QUALIFYING

4 goals	Didier Drogba
3 goals	Wilfried Bony, Gervinho

POPULATION

20.6 million

TACTICS

The Ivorians strength is a tight defence, a surging midfield and the finishing ability of Drogba up front.

100 per cent...Zahoui

COACH

Francis ZAHOUI

Holds the distinction of being the first black African to play in Serie A, although he spent most of his career in the French league. He succeeded Sven Goran Eriksson after the 2010 World Cup and led the Ivorians through their qualifying group with a 100 per cent record.

Headlock...Doumbia (left) with South Africa's Reneilwe Letsholonyane

KEY PLAYERS

Seydou DOUMBIA

Forward with CSKA Moscow who will be expected to make an instant impact when he comes off the substitutes' bench.

Didier DROGBA

The long-serving Chelsea striker is still key to the team with a phenomenal goals-to-game ratio for his country.

GERVINHO

These days the Arsenal striker's artistry and speed is the pivot on which the Elephants' hopes turn.

Yaya TOURE

The younger of Manchester City's Toure brothers is a powerhouse who provides the muscle in midfield.

Strike power...Gervinho

Didier ZOKORA

Now with Trabzonspor in Turkey, the captain has switched from midfield to centre-back and could pass 100 caps during the finals.

LIBYA

The Mediterranean Knights

GROUP A SCHEDULE

21.01.12 Equatorial Guinea
25.01.12 Zambia
29.02.12 Senegal

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Runners-up 1982

We've done it...Libya celebrate the victory over Mozambique that put them in the finals

The achievement of qualifying for the finals will ultimately be hailed as a remarkable triumph for a country whose civil strife forced them to play five of their six games away from home. After beating Zambia in Tripoli at the start of the campaign, their remaining "home" matches were played in Mali and Egypt.

The revolution to rid the country of Muammar Gaddafi splintered the squad and left Libya having to rebuild their team by the time they finished their campaign. The side went through multiple personality changes – celebrating a victory over Comoros in the preliminaries in March with chants in favour of Gaddafi and his regime, to the emotive wearing of the colours of the Libyan revolution when they played their last two games.

Two of the players even fought with the rebels, while another had relatives killed in the NATO air raids. Yet despite all this Libya went through the qualifiers unbeaten to reach the finals for the third time.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

05.09.10	Mozambique (a)	0-0
10.10.10	Zambia (h)	1-0
28.03.11	Comoros (h)*	3-0
05.06.11	Comoros (a)	1-1
03.09.11	Mozambique (h)*	1-0
08.1011	Zambia (a)	0-0

** played at a neutral venue*

GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zambia	6	4	1	1	11	2	13
Libya**	6	3	3	0	6	1	12
Mozambique	6	2	1	3	4	6	7
Comoros	6	0	1	5	2	14	1

*** qualified as best runners-up*

TOP SCORERS IN QUALIFYING

1 goal six different players

POPULATION

5.7 million

TACTICS

Zuway is the team's target man, backed up by quick wide men in Cheri and Kahatroushi, while Mahamat is the creative midfield supply line.

Paid his way...Paqueta

COACH

Marcos PAQUETA

The Brazilian was Saudi Arabia's coach at the 2006 World Cup finals before signing a four-year deal with Libya in mid-2010. He was not paid for some seven months because of the fighting. During this time he stayed in Rio de Janeiro, but paid his own way to join up with the team for the qualifiers.

KEY PLAYERS

Samir ABOUD

The 39-year-old goalkeeper was the hero of the last qualifier with saves that kept the country on track for the finals.

Rebel...Kahatroushi

Veteran...Saad

Walid KAHATROUSHI

Fought with the rebels during the anti-Gaddafi revolution but now back to playing football.

Djamal MAHAMAT

The only player at a European club, he is a midfield playmaker with Portuguese side Beira Mar.

Handful...Zuway

Ahmed SAAD

Now in Tunisia with Club Africain, the veteran played at his country's last African Nations Cup finals appearance in 2006.

Ahmed ZUWAY

Tall striker who is a handful for defenders and is another who appeared at the 2006 African Nations Cup. Plays with Bizertin in Tunisia.

MALI

Les Aigles (The Eagles)

GROUP D SCHEDULE

24.01.12 Guinea
28.01.12 Ghana
01.02.12 Botswana

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Runners-up 1972

Going through...Kante (left) hails his goal in the draw in Liberia with Kalilou Traore

Given the number of genuine top-class players in Mali's squad, the country has promised much over the past few years but delivered very little.

At the last African Nations Cup, in Angola, they found themselves in a modest group yet managed to lose at the first hurdle, throwing away a four-goal lead in the opening match against the hosts. To qualify this time they edged past Zimbabwe and Cape Verde Islands, and there is a feeling they could yet crack under real pressure.

French coach Alain Giresse has written off long-standing stars such as Mohamed Sissoko and Mahamadou Diarra, and refuses to get excited about the return to the squad after 18 months of self-imposed exile of Seydou Keita. "They are all too old," says Giresse, who was at the last African Nations Cup with Gabon and took over from Stephen Keshi after Mali's spectacular crash in Luanda.

Mali's record in 2011 was four wins and three losses, with the victories coming in key African Nations Cup qualifiers and the defeats in friendlies and in a qualifier in Zimbabwe.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

04.09.10	Cape Verde (a)	0-1
09.10.10	Liberia (h)	2-1
26.03.11	Zimbabwe (h)	1-0
05.06.11	Zimbabwe (a)	1-2
03.09.11	Cape Verde (h)	3-0
08.10.11	Liberia (a)	2-2

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mali	6	3	1	2	9	6	10*
Cape Verde	6	3	1	2	7	7	10*
Zimbabwe	6	2	2	2	7	5	8
Liberia	6	1	2	3	7	12	5

** Mali had a better head-to-head record against Cape Verde*

TOP SCORER IN QUALIFYING

4 goals Cheick Diabate

POPULATION

14.5 million

TACTICS

Mali play with a single striker, usually Maiga, and then tuck the key components of their attack just behind him.

Age issue...Giresse

COACH

Alain GIRESSE

Played in the World Cup finals with France and was a member of their European Championship winning side in 1984. His coaching career has been much less distinguished, with spells at Toulouse and Paris Saint-Germain in Ligue 1, and overseas assignments at Royal Armed Forces in Morocco and the national teams of Georgia, Gabon and now Mali.

KEY PLAYERS

Adama COULIBALY

Veteran centre-back who is the captain of the team and now at Auxerre.

Modibo MAIGA

The Sochaux striker's £7million move to Newcastle United fell through in December after concern over his knees.

Return from exile...Keita

Graduate...Abdou Traore

Seydou KEITA

The Barcelona midfielder ended a long exile from the national team in October.

Abdou TRAORE

Has come through the youth ranks of Mali football and is now on loan at Nice from Bordeaux.

Kalilou TRAORE

Imposing figure in the midfield who has played club football in Morocco, Croatia and now Denmark, with Odense.

Imposing...Kalilou Traore

MOROCCO

Atlas Lions

GROUP C SCHEDULE

23.01.12 Tunisia
27.01.12 Gabon
31.01.12 Niger

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Winners 1976

Friendly strike...Chamakh (no17) is feted after scoring against Northern Ireland

Morocco have been to four World Cups, stretching back to 1970, and qualified for 14 African Nations Cup tournaments, which makes them one of the continent's most successful teams. But although they will be among the favourites this year, it is 36 years since they have been able to call themselves African champions.

After missing the last tournament, and playing poorly in Ghana in 2008, this year is a golden opportunity due to the absence of big guns such as Cameroon, Egypt and Nigeria.

The age-old problem of trying to integrate Europe-born immigrant children with local players in the national side finally appears to be over, mainly because most of the current squad hails from the diaspora. Young players born in Belgium, France, Holland and elsewhere in western Europe to Moroccan parents now provide a steady stream of quality talent.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

04.09.10	Cen African Rep (h)	0-0
09.10.10	Tanzania (a)	1-0
27.03.11	Algeria (a)	0-1
04.06.11	Algeria (h)	4-0
04.09.11	Cen African Rep (a)	0-0
09.10.11	Tanzania (h)	3-1

GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco	6	3	2	1	8	2	11
Cen Afr Rep	6	2	2	2	5	5	8
Algeria	6	2	2	2	5	8	8
Tanzania	6	1	2	3	6	9	5

TOP SCORER IN QUALIFYING

2 goals Marouane Chamakh

POPULATION

32.2 million

TACTICS

Defensive-minded midfielders will protect the back four and allow Boussoufa and Taarabt to display their talents.

Top start...Gerets

COACH

Eric GERETS

Took over late last year and steered Morocco to top place in their qualifying group. The former Belgium defender played in two World Cups and has coached top clubs sides PSV Eindhoven, Kaiserslautern, Wolfsburg, Galatasaray and Marseille. Morocco is his first job as a national team boss.

Lured to Anzhi... Boussoufa

KEY PLAYERS

Ismail AISSATI

Ajax midfielder who was capped by Holland at under-21 level before deciding to throw his lot in with Morocco.

Mehdi BENATIA

Born in France, plays for Udinese in Italy and apparently on the radar of several top English clubs.

Mbark BOUSSOUFA

Holland-born, he was voted the best player in Belgium during his time at Anderlecht before being lured to Anzhi Makhachkala in Russia.

Key striker...Chamakh

Restored...Taarabt (right)

Marouane CHAMAKH

Does not play regularly for his club side, Arsenal, but is still a key component of the national team strategy.

Adel TAARABT

Queens Park Rangers forward who is back in the side after storming out of the squad in June, only to be forgiven by Gerets.

NIGER

Mena Stars

GROUP C SCHEDULE

23.01.12	Gabon
27.01.12	Tunisia
31.01.12	Morocco

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Never qualified before

Determined...Dan Kowa (in white) halts South Africa's Teko Modise in Niamey

There have been fewer weaker teams at past African Nations Cup finals than the Mena Stars, whose nickname comes from the local word for a gazelle.

Despite entering every tournament since 2000 they were not even on the radar when the preliminaries began in September 2010, and had just 11 wins in 42 qualifying games stretching back intermittently to 1970. Drawn with defending champions Egypt and 2010 World Cup hosts South Africa, Niger were looked upon as nothing but cannon fodder in their group. So it was arguably the biggest shock in the history of the qualifiers when they finished top – albeit because of the stupidity of South Africa, as Niger won on a three-way head-to-head when South Africa settled for a draw because they thought that goal difference would see them through.

Niger did well at home in the qualifiers but were hopeless on the road and these finals could prove overwhelming.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

04.09.10	South Africa (a)	0-2
10.10.10	Egypt (h)	1-0
27.03.11	Sierra Leone (h)	3-1
04.06.11	Sierra Leone (a)	0-1
04.09.11	South Africa (h)	2-1
08.10.11	Egypt (a)	0-3

GROUP G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Niger	6	3	0	3	6	8	9*
South Africa	6	2	3	1	4	2	9*
Sierra Leone	6	2	3	1	5	5	9*
Egypt	6	1	2	3	5	5	5

** Niger beat South Africa and Sierra Leone on a three-way head-to-head*

TOP SCORER IN QUALIFYING

2 goals Moussa Maazou

POPULATION

15.7 million

TACTICS

Maazou proves the centre piece of all Niger's play as they look to feed the burly striker with plenty of opportunities.

Doubts...Gabde

COACH

Harouna Doula GABDE

A former international full-back, he took on the job in 2009 but has no experience outside the arid west African country and his own federation are now beginning to doubt whether he will be able to cope with the tournament pressure. French coach Rolland Courbis has been brought in to help him.

KEY PLAYERS

Amadou KADER

Part of a colony of players from Niger at Cameroon champions Coton Sport.

Cameroon base... Kader (right)

Flying...Alhassane Issoufou

Kassaly DAOUDA

Goalkeeper who competed in the 2008 CAF Champions League Final for Coton Sport of Cameroon.

Alhassane ISSOUFOU

Won the African Confederation Cup with FUS Rabat of Morocco last year but was recently signed by Raja Casablanca.

Boubacar ISSOUFOU

Midfielder who plays club football in Thailand with Phuket and is likely to be the only Asia-based player, outside the Middle East, at the 2012 finals.

Moussa MAAZOU

The big striker has struggled at club level lately while on loan to Zulte Waregem of Belgium from CSKA Moscow.

Struggling...Maazou

SENEGAL

Lions of Teranga

GROUP A SCHEDULE

21.01.12 Zambia
25.01.12 Equatorial Guinea
29.01.12 Libya

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Runners-up 2002

In control...Diame fends off Cameroon's Samuel Eto'o (left) and Landry N'Guemo

A decade after exploding onto the African football scene with a team that were only denied victory in the 2002 African Nations Cup Final by penalties and reached the World Cup quarter-finals the same year, Senegal have produced another exciting side of similar potential.

In Papiss Cisse, Moussa Sow and Mamadou Niang they have a strike force which is as lethal as any previously seen at the tournament and have a legitimate claim to be regarded among the favourites in 2012. Sow was the top scorer in France's Ligue 1 last season, while Cisse came second in the Bundesliga goalscoring charts, and their credentials at international level were firmly displayed in the toughest of qualifying groups in which they romped past former continental champions Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In the 10 months leading up to the end of 2011, Senegal won 11 games, drew one and lost just once – in a friendly against Morocco in August.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

05.09.10	Congo DR (a)	4-2
09.10.10	Mauritius (h)	7-0
26.03.11	Cameroon (h)	1-0
04.06.11	Cameroon (a)	0-0
03.09.11	Congo DR (h)	2-0
09.10.11	Mauritius (a)	2-0

GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal	6	5	1	0	16	2	16
Cameroon	6	3	2	1	12	5	11
Congo DR	6	2	1	3	10	11	7
Mauritius	6	0	0	6	2	22	0

TOP SCORERS IN QUALIFYING

5 goals Mamadou Niang
4 goals Papiss Cisse, Moussa Sow

POPULATION

13.7 million

TACTICS

A three-man attack is key, supplemented by a strong tackling and a physically imposing midfield.

Stalwart...Traore

COACH

Amara TRAORE
Regarded as the elder statesman of the 2002 team when he was coming to the end of his playing days in France, where his clubs included Bastia, Gueugnon and Metz. Coach since December 2009, he has just been offered a contract extension by the federation.

KEY PLAYERS

Papiss CISSE
Scored 22 goals for Freiburg in the Bundesliga last season, the second best return of the campaign.

Mohamed DIAME
Wigan Athletic defensive midfielder whose past performances have attracted interest from Premier League rivals Arsenal and Spain's Sevilla.

Goal threat...Cisse (left)

Veteran...Niang

Souleymane DIAWARA
Marseille centre-back who made his debut for the national team 10 years ago.

Mamadou NIANG
Will compete in his fourth African Nations Cup finals. Plays for Al Sadd in Qatar.

Moussa SOW
Scored the goals that took Lille to the league title in France last season.

Front runner...Sow

SUDAN

Falcons of Jediane

GROUP B SCHEDULE

22.01.12 Ivory Coast
26.01.12 Angola
30.01.12 Burkina Faso

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Winners 1970

Building up...Sudan took third place in last February's African Nations Championship

One of the four founder members of the Confederation of African Football, Sudan are among the five past winners of the trophy in the 2012 field.

Their title success came in 1970, but their appearance at the 2008 finals in Ghana was a first successful qualification for 32 years. Although a lot more competitive of late, they almost missed out this time round when losing at home to Ghana on the final day of the qualifiers, only to sneak in as one of the two best runners-up.

Sudan are in an unusual situation in African football with an entirely home-based squad, with almost all the players coming from the two big Khartoum clubs, Al Hilal and Al Merreikh. The two clubs have emerged as serious contenders for African titles in recent years and the increased exposure to top competition has been positive for the national team too. While coach Mohamed Abdallah says he would like to see more of his squad play for clubs abroad, he accepts it is also a bonus having a home-based squad which allows time for extra work.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

04.09.10	Congo (h)	2-0
10.10.10	Ghana (a)	0-0
27.03.11	Swaziland (h)	3-0
05.06.11	Swaziland (a)	2-1
04.09.11	Congo (a)	1-0
08.10.11	Ghana (h)	0-2

GROUP I

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana	6	5	1	0	13	1	16
Sudan*	6	4	1	1	8	3	13
Congo	6	2	0	4	5	10	6
Swaziland	6	0	0	6	2	14	0

** qualified as second-best runner-up*

TOP SCORERS IN QUALIFYING

2 goals Mohammed Bisha, Muhamed Tahil

POPULATION

31 million

TACTICS

Technically proficient with plenty of ability. However, they lack both confidence in front of goal and strength in defence.

COACH

Mohamed ABDALLAH

Led Sudan to their first African Nations Cup appearance in 32 years in 2008, but was replaced afterwards – only to return a year later for a second spell in charge. He was first appointed national team coach in September 2004 and as a player he was a Sudan international.

Second spell... Abdallah

Goal hungry...El Tahir

Key defender...Ahmed

Mahjoub EL MOEZ

Long-standing goalkeeper of a settled side with more than 60 caps.

Haitham MOSTAFA

Veteran captain whose engine belies his 34 years.

Inspiration...Mostafa

KEY PLAYERS

Mudathir EL TAHIR

Has a prolific scoring record for Al Hilal and has grabbed key international goals.

Khalifa AHMED

Has emerged in the last year as vital defensive cog.

Omar BAKHEIT

Attacking full-back who is one of several who also played in the 2008 African Nations Cup finals.

TUNISIA

The Eagles of Carthage

GROUP C SCHEDULE

23.01.12 Morocco
27.01.12 Niger
31.01.12 Gabon

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Winners 2004

That was close...Tunisia celebrate qualifying for the finals after victory over Togo

Despite a tumultuous 12 months for the country – during which the people's revolution toppled the regime of Zinedine Ben Ali and sparked winds of change throughout the Middle East – Tunisia's national team have qualified for a 10th successive African Nations Cup finals.

In a season in which the domestic league was suspended because of the violence, Tunisia still managed to win the African Nations Championship (for international teams made up of home-based players) and club side Esperance ended a 17-year drought in the CAF Champions League Final in November.

The national side did, however, leave it late. Lying third behind Botswana (who had already qualified) and Malawi, Tunisia had to win their last game at home to Togo and hope Malawi came unstuck in Chad. Although they had no problem in seeing off Togo, it all seemed irrelevant as Malawi led in Ndjamena – until Chad managed an equaliser deep in added time.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

01.07.10	Botswana (h)	0-1
11.08.10	Chad (a)	3-1
04.09.10	Malawi (h)	2-2
10.10.10	Togo (a)	2-1
17.11.10	Botswana (a)	0-1
05.06.11	Chad (h)	5-0
03.09.11	Malawi (a)	0-0
08.10.11	Togo (h)	2-0

GROUP K

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Botswana*	8	5	2	1	7	3	17
Tunisia*	8	4	2	2	14	6	14
Malawi	8	2	6	0	13	8	12
Togo	8	1	3	4	6	10	6
Chad	8	0	3	5	7	20	3

** top two in Group K qualified*

TOP SCORER IN QUALIFYING

6 goals Issam Jemaa

POPULATION

11.2 million

TACTICS

Tunisia are a strong side, with plenty of enterprise, but may lack confidence after struggling to qualify.

Stabilising influence...Trabelsi

COACH

Sami TRABELSI

Tunisia have been through four coaches since the last African Nations Cup, but the 1998 World Cup defender has brought stability after his appointment in January. He had success at the CHAN Championship with the home-based team and has managed to integrate them with the country's foreign-based stars.

KEY PLAYERS

Sami ALLAGUI

Germany-born striker with Mainz who made his debut in 2008 but has only recently become a regular.

Newly established...Allagui

Battler...Chikhaoui

Yassine CHIKHAOUI

Tall utility player who has battled his way through several injuries back into contention. Plays for Zurich in Switzerland.

Oussama DARRAGI

Clever midfielder whose disciplinary record with Esperance leaves much to be desired.

Karim HAGGUI

Hanover defender who made his international debut at 19 and is now captain of the side, some 60 caps and eight years later.

Hocine RAGUED

Defensive midfielder who plays for Karabukspor in Turkey and stabilises the national side.

Midfield rock...Ragued

ZAMBIA

Chipolopolo (The Copper Bullets)

GROUP A SCHEDULE

21.01.12 Senegal
25.01.12 Libya
29.01.12 Equatorial Guinea

PREVIOUS BEST PERFORMANCE

Runners-up 1974, 1994

Front man...Mbesuma plays his part as Zambia hold Libya to a draw to claim top spot

Zambia have reached 11 of the last 12 African Nations Cup finals – a record spoilt only by missing out in 2004 following defeat in Benin amid allegations of manipulation of the game by match officials – and they will have ambitions of making the final four after finishing runners-up twice.

After finishing ahead of Libya in their qualifying group, the pair are drawn together. It was the 0-0 home draw with Libya in October that led to Dario Bonetti being fired as coach, even though he had led them to the top of their group. The Italian had been imposed on the cash-strapped football association by the government, who paid his salary, with Bonetti sourced by the son of president Rupiah Banda, who worked in the embassy in Rome.

When Banda lost a re-election bid in September, the association moved to get rid of the Italian, who they had never been happy with but were prepared to tolerate as they were not paying for him.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

05.09.10	Comoros (h)	4-0
10.03.11	Libya (a)	0-1
27.03.11	Mozambique (a)	2-0
04.06.11	Mozambique (h)	3-0
04.09.11	Comoros (a)	2-1
08.10.11	Libya (h)	0-0

GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zambia	6	4	1	1	11	2	13
Libya	6	3	3	0	6	1	12
Mozambique	6	2	1	3	4	6	7
Comoros	6	0	1	5	2	14	1

TOP SCORERS IN QUALIFYING

3 goals Chris Katongo, Emmanuel Mayuka

POPULATION

13 million

TACTICS

Chansa controls the game and runs the show from midfield. But while there is a lot of speed and strength ahead of him, the defence is a little immobile.

Back...Renard

COACH

Herve RENARD

The Frenchman has admitted he was greedy and made a mistake in leaving Zambia to take up a job offer from Angola after the last African Nations Cup. He lasted just six months and did not hesitate to return when Zambia asked him back in October.

Wing wizard...Katongo

KEY PLAYERS

Isaac CHANSA

Orlando Pirates midfielder who is the key orchestrator of all Zambia's attacks.

Chris KATONGO

Team captain and a pacy winger with good finishing ability. Spent four years in Europe before joining Henan Construction in China.

Young star...Mayuka

Emmanuel MAYUKA

The youngest player at the 2007 Under-20 World Cup and 2008 African Nations Cup. Now 21 he plays for Swiss side Young Boys.

Collins MBESUMA

Now with Golden Arrows in South Africa, he flopped during spells in England, Portugal and Turkey.

Kennedy MWEENE

This will be a fourth successive African Nations Cup for the penalty-taking keeper who plays for South Africa's Free State Stars.

Fourth time...Mweene

PLAYER Biography

Didier Drogba

The big Ivory Coast striker has made his mark both on and off the pitch for the land of his birth. By Nick Bidwell

Power and control...Ivory Coast skipper Drogba towers over Israel's Eran Zahavi during a friendly in Geneva last August

A proven marksman with Brest, Angouleme, Dunkerque, Besancon and Abbeville in the French second division for much of the 1980s, and an Ivory Coast international on 30 occasions, Michel Goba was by no means a shabby player.

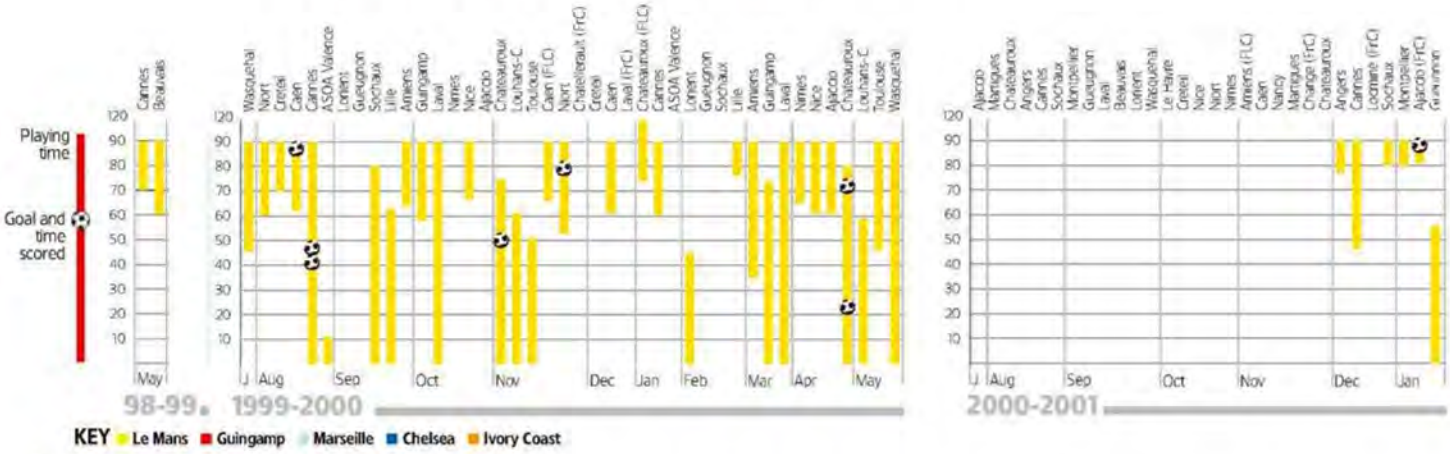
His greatest achievement in the game, however, is surely the part that he has played in the upbringing and football education of a nephew who spent a large proportion of his formative years under his uncle's roof.

Influenced by economic malaise in the Ivory Coast and the conviction that France offered more in the way of prospects, Didier Drogba's parents, Albert (a bank employee) and Clotilde (a tax office worker), twice packed their son off for lengthy sojourns with his uncle Michel. The boy was just five when he first left home and certainly had his problems adjusting to a new life far from the family cocoon in the Yopougon district of the capital Abidjan. But his "Chez Goba" period undeniably helped shape his destiny and laid the building blocks for what has turned out to be a stunning career on the world stage.

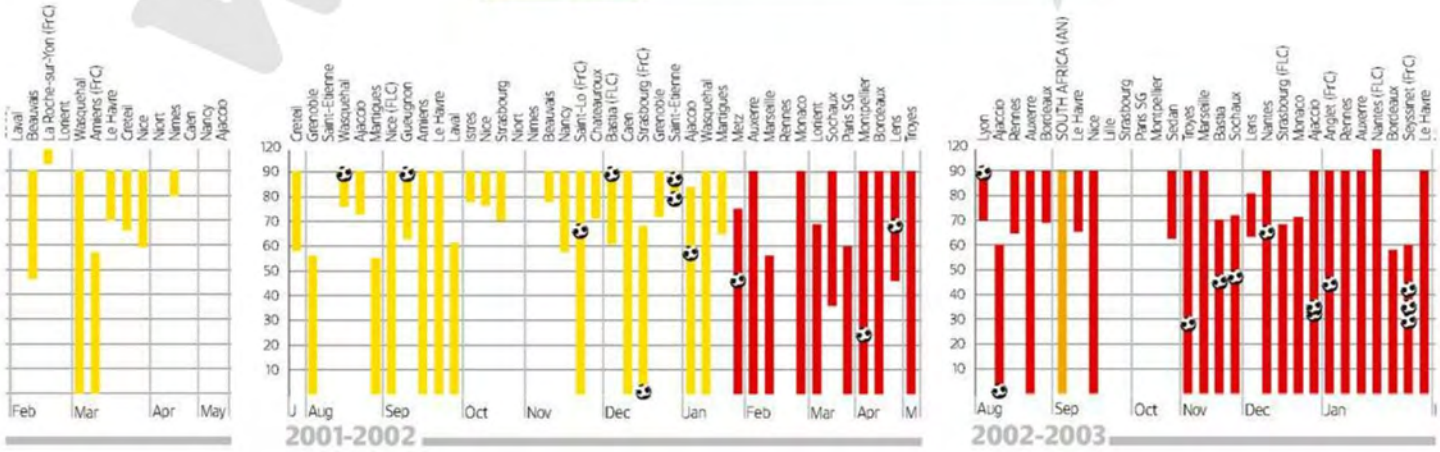
Having a footballer for a legal guardian not only sparked Drogba's love of the game but also a burning desire to emulate his father figure. With Goba there to advise and correct, he had the ideal mentor and, without realising it at the time, every day was a lesson in how to make it as a professional sportsman, with a unique

TIMELINE: EVERY MATCH, EVERY MINUTE, EVERY GOAL

WC World Cup qualifier
WCF World Cup finals
AN African Nations Cup qualifier
ANF African Nations Cup finals
CL Champions League
UC UEFA Cup/Europa League
FrC French Cup
FLC French League Cup
EC English FA Cup
ELC English League Cup
ECS English Community Shield



Sep 8, 2002 – makes his international debut in a 0-0 home draw with South Africa in the African Nations Cup qualifiers.



FACT FILE

Didier Yves Drogba Tebily

Nationality
Ivorian

Age
33 (11.03.78)

Place of birth
Abidjan, Ivory Coast

Height
6ft 2½in (1.89m)

Position
Forward

Teams
Le Mans
1998-2002 (72 games/15 goals)
Guingamp
2002-2003 (50 games/24 goals)
Marseille
2003-2004 (55 games/32 goals)
Chelsea
2004-present (320 games/149 goals)*
Ivory Coast
2002-present (76 games/50 goals)

Honours
Chelsea
Premier League 2005, 2006, 2010; FA Cup 2007, 2009, 2010; English League Cup 2005, 2007; English Community Shield 2005, 2009

** up to 17.12.11*

Family fortunes...Michel Goba with a photo of his nephew Drogba as a child

insight into all the job entailed.

Goba, who after each of his matches would make a point of handing Drogba a swapped shirt, was also responsible for the youngster's predilection for leading the line. In his first taste of organised football, aged 11 at Dunkerque, Drogba initially lined up at right-back, only for his uncle to tell him to assume the centre-forward position. His rationale was the unforgettable phrase: "Attackers are the only ones noticed in this game."

Drogba dutifully complied and, consciously or not, his playing style would soon come to closely resemble that of his uncle. Although the Chelsea and Ivory Coast striker clearly has the edge in terms of speed, physical power and mobility, the pair do share many similar characteristics, not least their durability, fighting spirit, strength in the air and a reliance on instinct.

The right option

Life is all about the direction taken at a particular set of crossroads and Drogba certainly took the right option in this instance. No adolescent switch to the front line would have meant no development into a 21st-century phenomenon, the recipient of a treasure chest of trophies in his seven-and-a-half seasons with Chelsea, plus two African Footballer of the Year awards (in 2006 and 2009), and wall-to-wall praise for the way he has helped transform the Ivory Coast into an international force.

Despite the knowledge bequeathed to him by his uncle, Drogba's path to the top of his chosen profession would still be a long and rocky one. He had to wait until the relatively advanced age of 23 to finally have a shot in the French top flight, with Guingamp in Brittany, and before that all-important breakthrough there were several setbacks to endure.

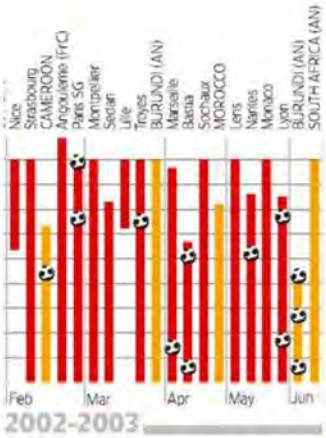
In 1991, shortly after his parents emigrated to France in order to reunite the family, they reacted to their 13-year-old son's poor results at school and typical teenage mischief by not allowing him to play the game for 12 months. Then, on joining the youth set-up at Greater Paris minor league outfit Levallois-Perret in 1993, he experienced four decidedly mixed seasons, alternating between the excellent – goals galore for the juniors had the club's technical director Srebrenko Repcic confidently predicting bountiful tomorrows for him – and the galling, which featured repeated injuries and little first-team recognition.

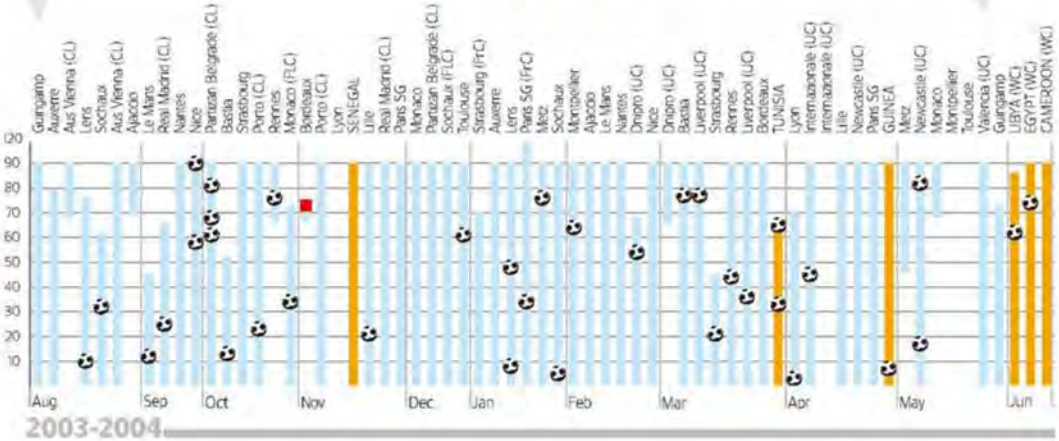
However, convinced of his potential, second division Le Mans appeared on

Recognition...Drogba wins the 2006 African Footballer of the Year award

Aug 2, 2003 – after joining Marseille from Guingamp in the summer of 2003, Drogba makes his debut for his new club...against Guingamp.

May 19, 2004 – having scored crucial goals in previous rounds, Drogba cannot find the net in the UEFA Cup Final as Marseille lose 2-0.





KEY Le Mans Guingamp Marseille Chelsea Ivory Coast

> "The thought that he was wasting his talent used to drive me crazy"
>
> Le Mans recruitment chief Alain Pascalou

the scene in 1997 to offer Drogba, who was by now 21, a contract. Yet once again his luck would be out. In his three-and-a-half seasons in the first team he scored just 15 times and, frustrated by his repeated spells on the treatment table and an alleged love of nightlife, the management lost patience with him.

"His behaviour wasn't as professional as it should have been," recalls Le Mans recruitment chief Alain Pascalou. "The thought that he was wasting his talent used to drive me crazy. In spite of all his silliness, his ability was plain to see."

Turning point

Agent and close friend Thierno Seydi claims Drogba was close to quitting the professional game at Le Mans and that he needed a lot of persuading to keep going. But persist he did, and in January 2002 his move to Guingamp proved to be a turning point.

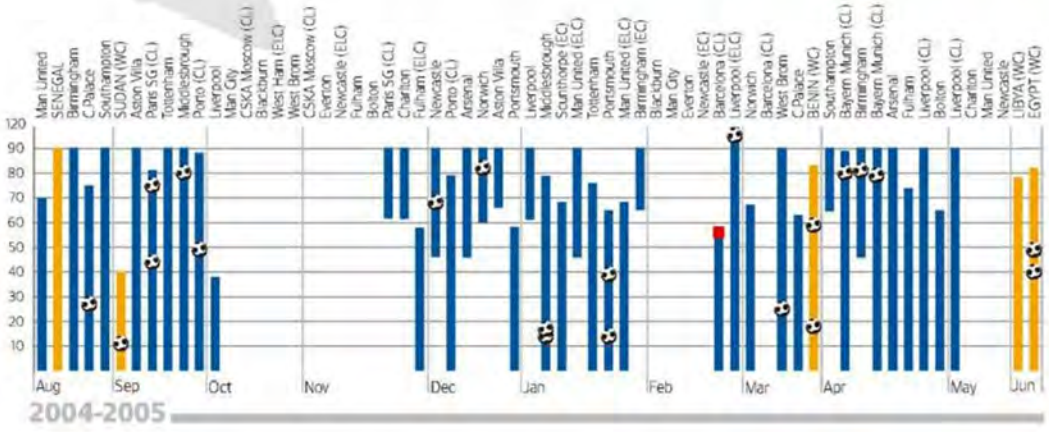
It is fair to say coach Guy Lacombe was the only figure at the club who thought it a good idea to bring in a back-up striker from the second tier, but there was something about Drogba that he liked. At long last, feeling that he had a boss who trusted and understood him, the Ivorian suddenly began to flourish, and he forged a wonderful attacking partnership with future France winger and later Chelsea team-mate Florent Malouda, who remains his best friend in the game, and he scored 17 goals in the 2002-03 Ligue 1 season.

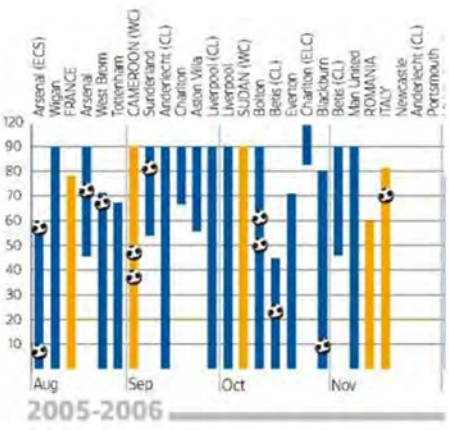
What a difference a few months makes. On a visit to Abidjan early in his

Step up...life with French second division club Le Mans brought frustration for Drogba

Reaping the rewards... Drogba hoists the Premier League trophy after his hat-trick helped Chelsea crush Wigan 8-0 to win the 2010 Premier League

Feb 27, 2005 – scores the winner to secure his first piece of silverware at Chelsea as they defeat Liverpool 3-2 after extra-time in the League Cup Final.





Velodrome hero...Drogba celebrates after scoring for Marseille against Partizan Belgrade in the Champions League

Best pals...with Chelsea team-mate Malouda (right)

Breakthrough...the young Drogba found his feet in the French top flight with Guingamp

Guingamp career, most of the people he met did not believe him when he told them that he was playing in the French elite and, in exasperation, he had to ring his friend Djibril Cisse, who was then with Auxerre, for confirmation.

Still cited in France as the man responsible for the emergence of Drogba, Lacombe insists it was only a matter of applying common sense, claiming: "The important thing with Didier was to make him realise there were no limits to what he could achieve. At first, when I demanded more from him, he didn't get it. Then the penny dropped. Going that extra yard, making that extra effort, became second nature.

"Because he'd had his share of disappointments before coming to Guingamp he knew he had no margin for error. He was ready to grasp his opportunity. I made it plain to him that his conduct off the pitch had to be right.

"That said, it is hard to walk on the wild side in Guingamp, the monastery of football!"

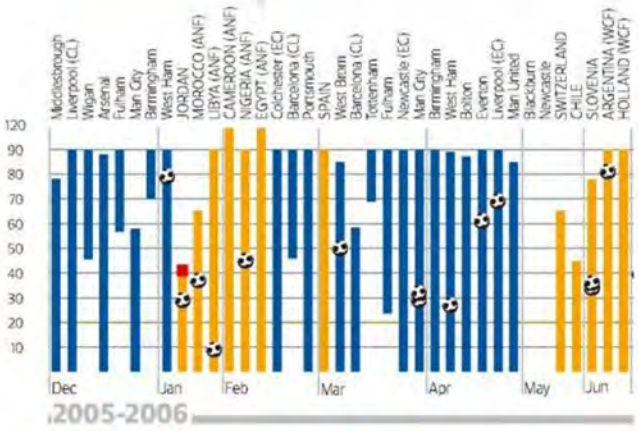
Marseille fan

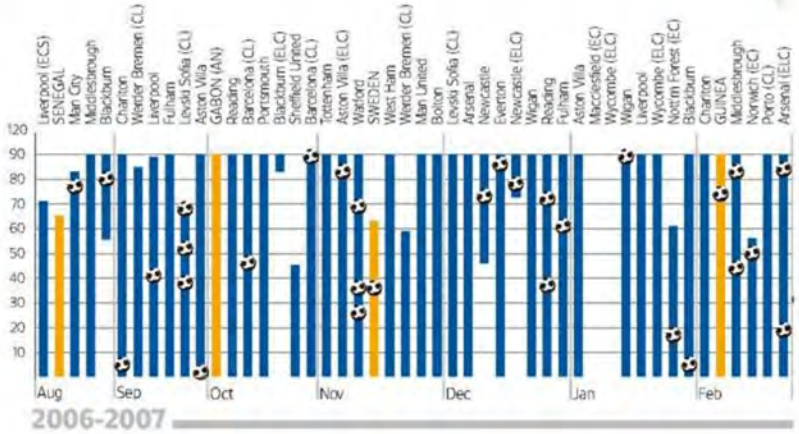
It soon became obvious that Guingamp – a small-town, corner shop of a club in a sea of supermarkets – would have to cash in, and in the summer of 2003 Lyon and Marseille were at daggers drawn for Drogba's signature. Lyon, the dominant French side of the moment, were sure their greater competitiveness, plus the extra €30,000 they were offering in salary, would see them home and dry. But Drogba, who had been a Marseille fan from an early age, was more than happy to let his heart rule his head and was absolutely overjoyed to complete an €8million move to the Stade Velodrome.

While many players sink without trace at Marseille, unable to cope with

Feb 10, 2006 – his penalty is saved as Ivory Coast lose to Egypt in the African Nations Cup Final in a shoot-out following a 0-0 draw after extra-time.

Feb 25, 2007 – scores both goals as Chelsea beat Arsenal 2-1 in the League Cup Final.





KEY Le Mans Guingamp Marseille Chelsea Ivory Coast

Driven hero...Drogba goes on a lap of the national stadium in Abidjan

the huge expectation and fans who turn on a passenger-performer in an instant, Drogba was unfazed. The fervour and passion spilling down from the stands brought the best out of him from the word go, and in a wonderful 2003-04 season he could not stop scoring, amassing 19 goals in Ligue 1 and 11 more in Europe as OM reached the Final of the UEFA Cup.

Sadly for the fans at "Stade Vel" their idol was not to stay long. Now established among the leading strikers in Europe, he was hot property, and when Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich put a £24m bid on the table in July 2004, OM president Christophe Bouchet simply could not say no to the oligarch windfall. Drogba was not best pleased when told to pack up and leave what he regarded as his spiritual home.

> "At first, when I demanded more from Didier he didn't get it...then the penny dropped" Guingamp coach Guy Lacombe

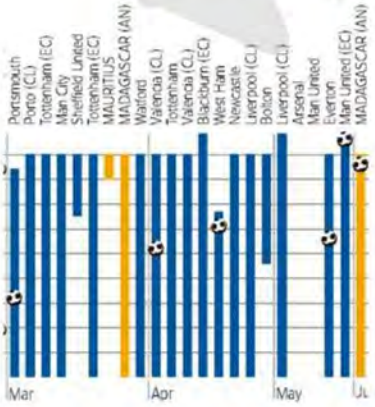
Reluctantly, to the point of hoping to fail his medical, he made tracks for south-west London, where Blues coach Jose Mourinho would wring even more line-leading effectiveness and hunger for goals out of him.

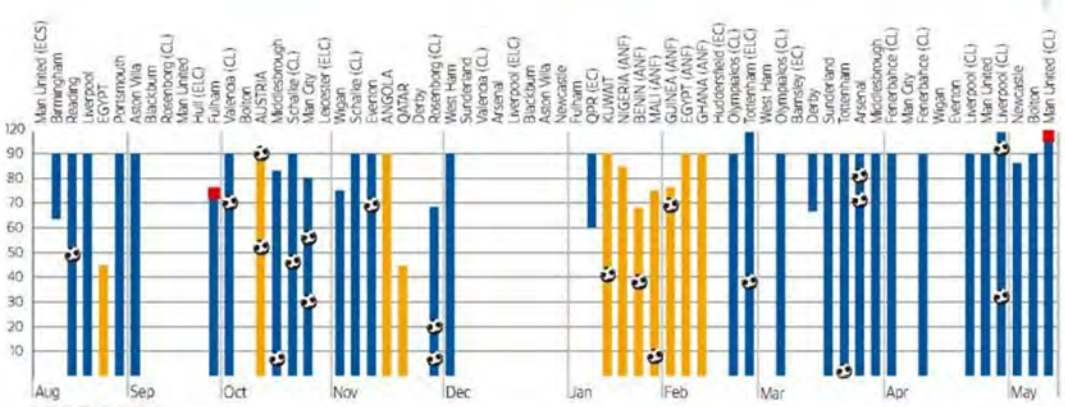
Lapses of discipline

With his penchant for simulation and lapses of discipline – particularly his red card in the Champions League Final loss to Manchester United in 2008, and a year later his foul-mouthed tirade to the cameras following his team's semi-final defeat by Barcelona in the same competition – criticism has been a constant companion. Still, no one can deny his massive contribution to

May 19, 2007 – another cup-winning goal for Chelsea, this time in the FA Cup to deny Manchester United the double.

May 21, 2008 – sent off in the Champions League Final against Manchester United. Chelsea lost on penalties after a 1-1 draw.

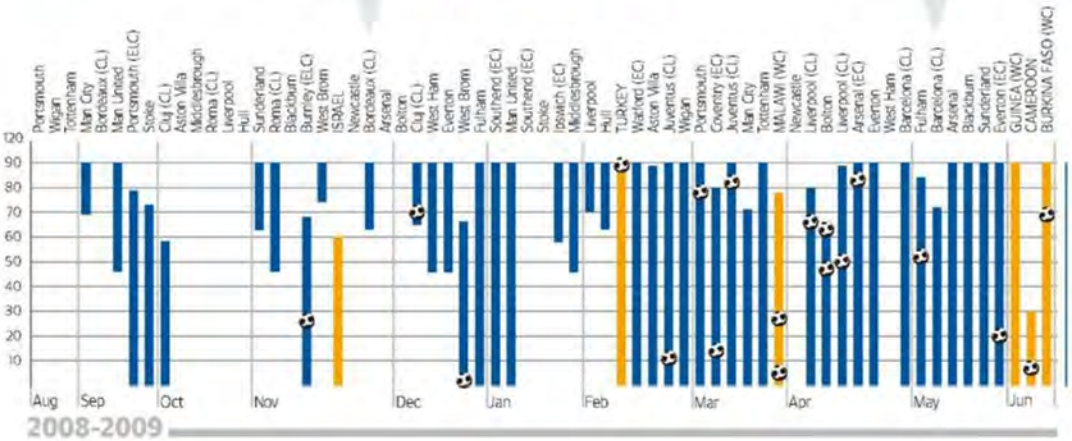




KEY ■ Chelsea ■ Ivory Coast

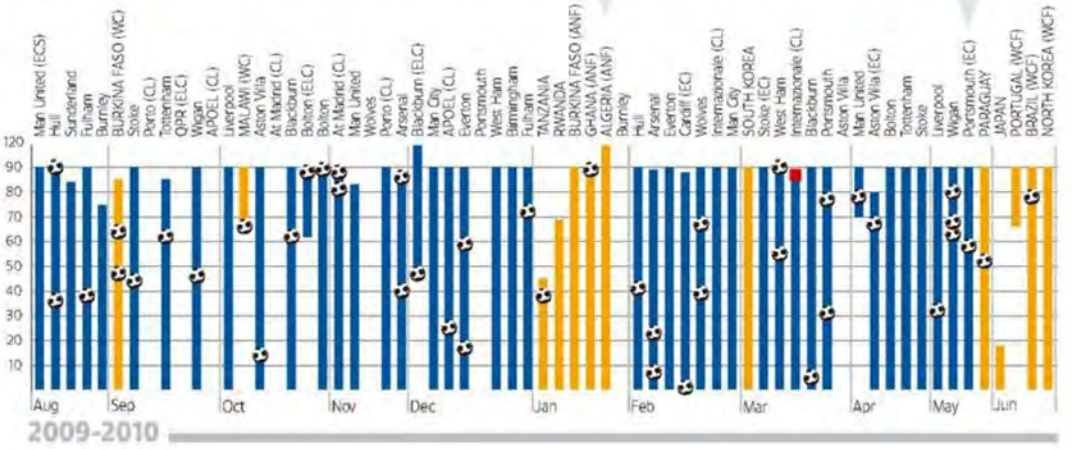
Nov 26, 2008 – Brazilian coach Luiz Felipe Scolari gave Drogba little game time during his short, unsuccessful spell in charge at Chelsea.

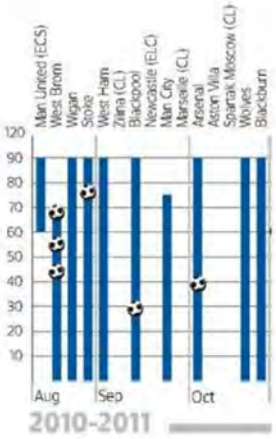
May 6, 2009 – after Chelsea are knocked out of the Champions League by an injury-time Andres Iniesta goal for Barcelona, Drogba rages at the referee after the game.



Jan 24, 2010 – another optimistic African Nations Cup campaign comes to an end as Ivory Coast are beaten 3-2 by Algeria in the quarter-finals.

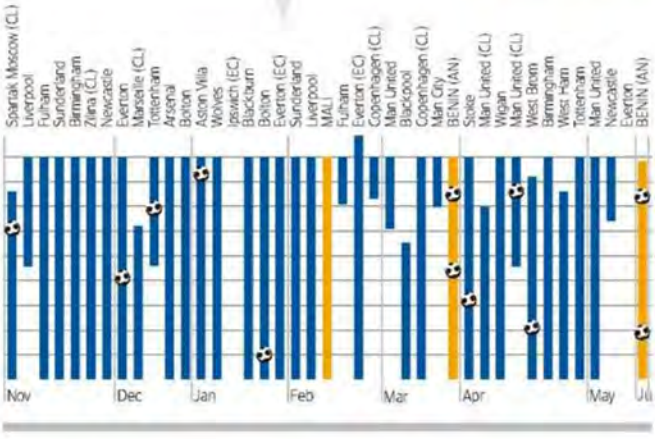
May 15, 2010 – Drogba's solitary goal at Wembley clinches the double as Chelsea beat Portsmouth to retain the FA Cup.

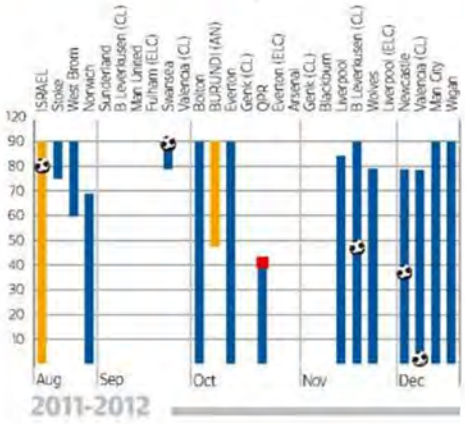




Feb 19, 2011 – hopes of a third successive FA Cup are extinguished as Chelsea go out on penalties in a replay at home to Everton.

Oct 23, 2011 – Drogba is sent off as Chelsea lose 2-1 to QPR in an ill-tempered west London derby.





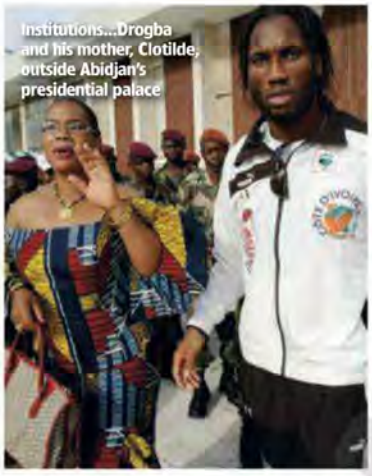
Chelsea. For years he has been the focal point of their attack and he will take some replacing when he leaves.

Because of Drogba's many years as a resident of France, Lacombe once claimed that if the French federation had been quicker off the mark, the big striker would now be playing for *Les Bleus*.

Such an assertion, however, fails to take into account the immense pride Drogba has in his Ivorian roots. His most vivid childhood memories are all African: the three-a-side games he used to take part in as a youngster in Yopougon – usually wearing his favourite Argentina shirt – and swimming in Lake Banko when visiting his grandmother, Helene. To his compatriots, he is just "Tito", the pet name given to him by his mother in honour of the former Yugoslav leader Marshal Tito. "I admired Tito's fighting spirit and wanted Didier to have some too," she explains.

And don't the Ivorians just adore him; the evidence leaping to the eye every place you look, with Drogba frescos to be found on the external walls of buildings up and down the land. Then

Ambassador for peace...Drogba is escorted by Ivorian rebel forces after an African Nations Cup game against Madagascar which was played, at his suggestion in Bouake, the rebels' stronghold



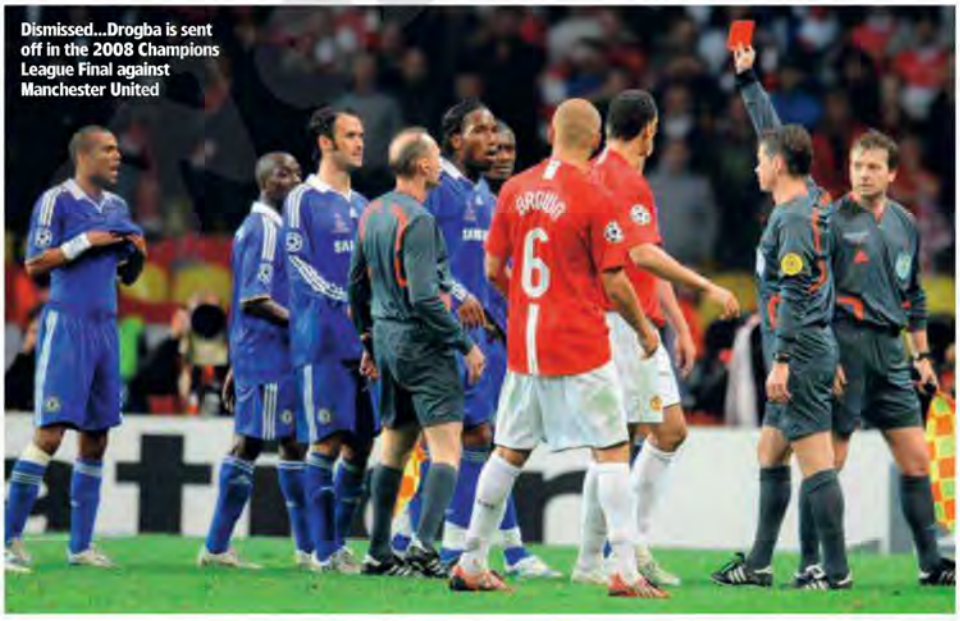
Institutions...Drogba and his mother, Clotilde, outside Abidjan's presidential palace

There are kids in No11 shirts and Beatlemania-like excitement erupts whenever he is back in the country

there are the massed ranks of kids in No11 shirts and the Beatlemania-like excitement which erupts whenever he is back in the country. If ordering an extra-large beer, you don't ask for the brand and the glass size, all you have do is ask for "a Drogba".

Since making his full debut for Ivory Coast back in 2002 against South Africa, Drogba has proved the cornerstone of his country's international efforts, providing both goals and leadership in helping them to qualify for the World Cups of 2006 and 2010. But it is not only on the pitch that he has brought influence to bear. One of a growing band of sportsmen who believe in the greater good, who strive to make a better society, the Ivorian skipper has felt sufficiently engaged and empowered to act as peacemaker in the long-running civil war in his homeland.

Hero worship...Drogba is surrounded by young children at a party held in Abidjan



Dismissed...Drogba is sent off in the 2008 Champions League Final against Manchester United

Peace process

After Ivory Coast had booked their ticket to the World Cup finals for the first time, in 2006, Drogba famously went down on his knees in front of the TV cameras to call for an end to the bloodshed. And, thanks to his universal appeal, his plea for talks not guns was heeded. Within a week a peace process had begun, and to keep everyone onside he put forward the suggestion that an African Nations Cup qualifier against Madagascar should be moved from Abidjan to Bouake, the rebel stronghold in the north. Unifying words plus unifying gesture equals unified country.

This commitment to a world beyond cheap celebrity continues to be part of his life. He has been appointed to the Ivory Coast's Truth and Reconciliation commission, and in 2007 he set up the Didier Drogba Foundation, which has achieved some remarkable results, particularly in its work with the Abidjan Red Cross and fund-raising for hospitals and orphanages in his home land.

More power to him. WS

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Facetoface

DIEGO

"For a Brazilian, to play in Europe is still the dream"

The midfielder has spent the last seven-and-a-half years in European club football and cost more than €50million in transfer fees

You have played in Portugal, Germany, Italy and now Spain. What brought you to Atletico Madrid, on loan from Wolfsburg?
I have joined one of the most popular teams in Europe, one of the biggest in Spain, and one of the strongest leagues. When you put those things together it's a very attractive proposition, the perfect combination. The decisions you take always depend on the moment, the timing. This is the second time that I have had the chance to come to Atletico. The first time the opportunity arose I had a problem with Werder Bremen, who didn't want me to leave for what was being offered. They asked for more money, and it went back and forth, the usual thing. Last year [when at Wolfsburg] we spoke again and this time it was immediate. I wanted to come. The chance to play in Spain was very important – and at a big club too.

Does constantly changing teams make it difficult for you as a player?
It can be hard, but it depends on which team you play for. If they have a system that facilitates your play, in which things come naturally and in which everyone plays a style that they are comfortable with, then it is easier. That did not happen at Juventus. They had built a team based on a specific idea and then, with the change of coach, everything changed. We played well some games, badly in others, but it just didn't quite work. It was hard for me. The other thing in Italy was that when you're trying to play a neat, passing game, based on skill, and you find that the pitches are bad...

Really? In what way are they bad?
They're dry and just, well, bad. Some pitches are very bad. The ball bobbles, it doesn't roll. The pitch isn't flat or even, which makes it hard to play the ball. Also, Italian teams defend very well and make it hard for you. But that doesn't change the fact that as an experience it was spectacular. I had a great relationship with the fans and my team-mates. It was also a great experience to play for one of the biggest clubs in the world.

Does it sometimes feel like your role, that of the playmaker, is being squeezed out of football?
I hope not. There are not many players in that role now, but you do see big teams play with number 10s, so I don't think it's a problem. The role has changed a bit, though. In modern football the number 10 has had to adapt, but there are still players whose function is to organise the play. At Atletico we play a 4-3-3 and I play in the middle, but there are other obligations. At Barcelona, there's [Andres] Iniesta who organises the play and has freedom when he has the ball, but when he doesn't have it he has to drop back into the middle. Then you have a player like Xavi who plays deeper, closer to the defence, but does it with the ball – it is his role to organise the team.

Why do you think you have moved around, from country to country, so much during your career?
Every time I have moved it has been because I had a better opportunity. It happened when I was in Portugal and I had the chance to move to Werder Bremen. It happened from there to Juventus. Maybe you could say that it was different when it came to the next step. After a year at Juventus a new coach came in and a new sporting director too. They had different ideas and that led us into a situation in which they were looking for a solution to the problem. The solution was a very good one – which was the chance for me to return to Germany, where I had played well and I had really enjoyed myself. The German league is one that I really like.

You left your homeland at 19. Are Brazilians forced to leave too soon because of the economic weakness of the league?
I think that's changing. In recent years, the Brazilian league has not been forced to sell players for financial reasons as much as in the past. If there are great players emerging now, like Neymar for example, it's not a question of money. Brazilian clubs can't keep an entire team together, but they can keep two or three players. The thing is that, for the player, the chance to play in Europe, in the Champions League, at a big club, with the best players in the world, is still the dream. That's still an objective.

Your old Santos team-mate Robinho went through a similar process to you, but he was ultimately unpopular in England. Do you think the English treated him unfairly?
It's hard. You need patience and people don't always have that. Players always try to do their best and when things don't go well that player has his responsibility for it, but those [the coaches] that are trying to use that player's talent also have responsibility. They have to bring that talent out; that's their job. Robinho played for a Manchester City team that did not suit his style of play. I think that was the reason why he did not play well. But for me he is still a spectacular player.

England is the one big European league missing in your collection. Would you go there?
It's one of the strongest leagues in the world and the most competitive. There are three or four teams that can win the league and that is attractive. But I have only just arrived in Spain and I am happy here. It's been everything I wanted it to be; the style is good, the experience too.

Interview by Diego Ribas

On Neymar...

"He's a special player who has the kind of talent that's hard to find these days. He's playing in the right team [Santos] and in the right country right now. Brazil needs players like that, a focal point to their football. The best thing for him now is to enjoy this moment, to never lose the happiness with which he plays"

Facetoface

GIANLUCA ZAMBROTTA

"A tackle is still a tackle no matter which country you are playing in"

Milan's 34-year-old defender, who has won the World Cup and played for three of the biggest club sides in Europe, reflects on his career and reveals his future plans

You've played at the top level in European club football with Juventus, Barcelona and Milan. What are the differences between these great clubs?
I think that a big club is a big club even if it is in a different country and these are three of the most important teams in the world. I can genuinely say that there are no distinctive or obvious differences between them – apart from at Barcelona, who tactically have a different, clearly defined style of play and a contrasting, more attacking approach to the game.

You played at Barcelona before Pep Guardiola turned them into the all-conquering side they are today. What was your impression of the Barca side you played in?
I played in Catalonia between 2006 and 2008 and it was a pleasure. The first year we ended on the same points as Real Madrid but lost La Liga because of the results of our head-to-head matches. The second season we reached the Champions League semi-finals and lost against the eventual winners, Manchester United. But, sadly, two seasons without winning important trophies are two unsuccessful years for a club like Barcelona. These were Frank Rijkaard's final days as coach, but even then I had an idea that something special was growing with that group of players.

You joined Milan in the summer of 2008. What were the tactical changes that you had to get used to?
For me, personally, almost nothing was different when I arrived in Italy from Spain. It is true that the style of play wasn't the same, but my job was identical. I have always played in a defensive back four, either at left-back or at right-back, so I did not find it difficult to adjust. A tackle is still a tackle no matter which country or league you are playing in.

You won a lot of Serie A titles with Marcello Lippi and Fabio Capello at Juventus. After more than five years, what is your opinion today about the *Calciopoli* scandal of 2006?
I am quite bored with *Calciopoli*. There has been far too much talking. I say every time that I have won five *Scudetti* in my career: four with Juve and one in Milan.

Why are so many veterans playing at Milan? What is the secret of players such as Clarence Seedorf, Filippo Inzaghi and, before them, Paolo Maldini and Franco Baresi?
There are no particular secrets, but the management at Milan is excellent and they know perfectly how to look after professional footballers. Every aspect, both on and off the pitch, is considered with great detail. As a player at Milan all you have to do is think about football, and that is a kind of heaven for every player. You also need to be very professional by looking after yourself and those footballers you mentioned are highly dedicated.

Who are the best full-backs in the world at the moment?
On the right I like Dani Alves of Barcelona, and the other special full-back is his fellow Brazilian, Maicon, who has now had several excellent seasons with Internazionale. I would also mention Ignazio Abate, who is one of the most promising youngsters at Milan. On the left-hand side I have liked Ashley Cole in recent years, but since his emergence there have been no other players who have truly excelled at left-back. I think that Gareth Bale of Tottenham Hotspur is very good but he is maybe more of a midfielder than a defender.

Would you prefer to win another *Scudetto* with the *Rossoneri* or bring home the Champions League trophy?
The Champions League, definitely. I have never won the European Cup. I lost a Final in Manchester, when I played with Juve against the *Rossoneri*, on penalties in 2003. Since winning the World Cup, the one I want most to get my hands on before retirement is this most important of club trophies. I think the Champions League is important for Milan too because they can earn more money from it. That said, last year we were very happy about winning the *Scudetto* after five years of Inter dominance.

What are your plans for your life after you retire from playing?
I have already opened a sporting complex in my home town of Como. I have always maintained a strong bond with my birthplace and that will continue. I remember that in the summer of 2006 I organised a party on the lakeside during which I showed the World Cup trophy to the people of Como. I think that I will work with youngsters in my sports centre, where we have many football pitches, a swimming pool and a gym. That is my plan.

You have had a glittering career, but which game do you consider to be your best-ever performance?
We have to go back to the World Cup in Germany, in 2006, and more precisely to Hamburg, where we played our quarter-final match against Ukraine. I scored the first goal and I made an assist for Luca Toni, who netted the second. We won 3-0, we reached the semi-final and I was extremely proud of my performance that day. I also played a good match last season in the derby game against Inter, in April, when we won 3-0, but I think the World Cup quarter-final was definitely my best ever. I still smile when I think of it.

Interview by Luca Ferrato

More on *Calciopoli*...

"It doesn't matter to me at all that the Italian federation cancelled those two championships. I won those trophies on the pitch and that is what I will always remember"

Winning ways

Jonathan Wilson explains how Sudamericana Cup-winners Universidad de Chile have developed a distinctive style

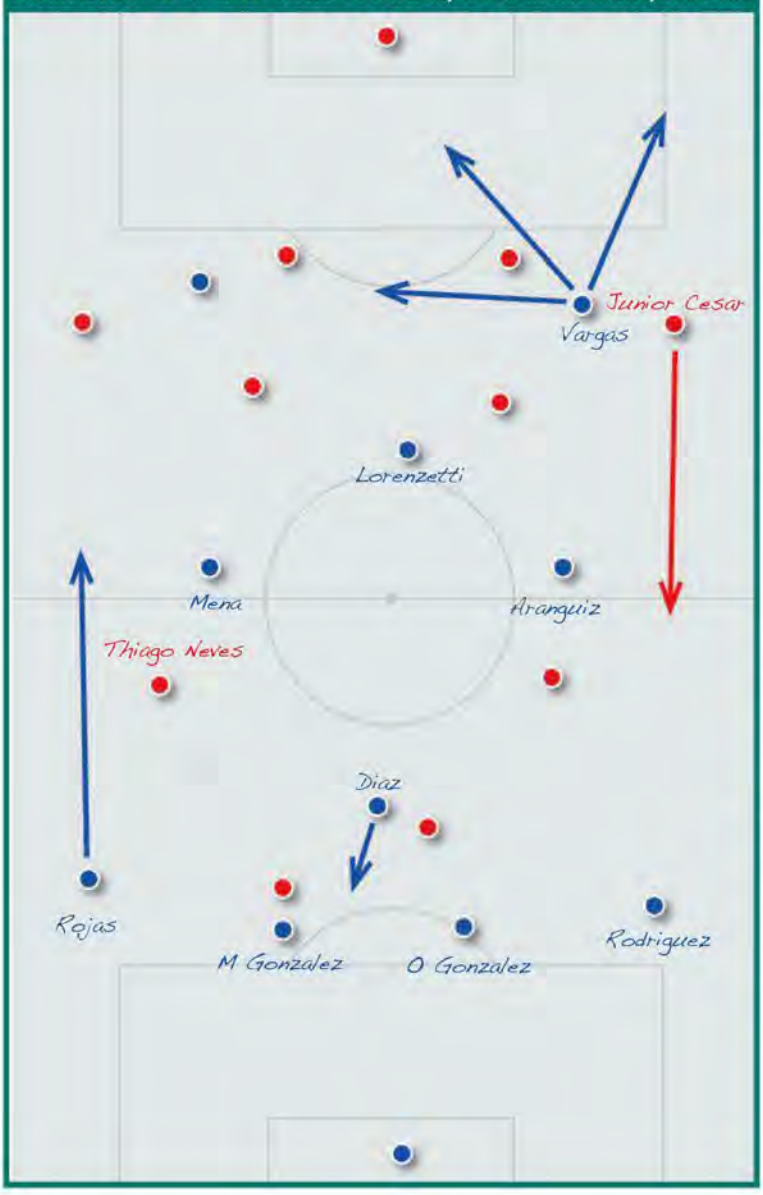
You wonder what Marcelo Bielsa must think of it all. In 2011 the two most successful club sides in the world have been Barcelona and Universidad de Chile. Both play hard pressing, attacking football, often going with three at the back. In other words, they both play *Bielsista* football – which raises the question of why the man himself is leading Athletic Bilbao to upper mid-table in Spain rather than managing one of the continent's giants.

It is probably that he is too idealistic and unable to deal with the politicking and compromises necessary for those in charge of the biggest organisations – something he perhaps demonstrated by his troubled handling of Juan Roman Riquelme when in charge of Argentina's national team. His theories, however, have taken root and are starting to dominate the world game.

Although Pep Guardiola's Barcelona remain a side that draws its basic principles from Rinus Michels, Johan Cruyff and the Dutch school of the early 1970s, the radicalism of late is derived from a fusion of the *Bielsista* and *totaalvoetbal* models.

The use of a midfielder, in Sergio Busquets, in the defensive line to initiate attacks is a classic Bielsa ploy – he is doing the same with Javi Martinez at Athletic – as is the principle that the key battles should, as far as possible, be conducted in the opponent's territory.

FLAMENGO 0 4 UNIV DE CHILE, SUDAMERICANA, 19.04.11



Disciple...Sampaoli

Varied and effective

Universidad de Chile coach Jorge Sampaoli is an out-and-out disciple of Bielsa. His basic model is a 3-4-3, with striker Eduardo Vargas (now with Napoli) cutting in from the right. Where Sampaoli stands out, though, is in his tweaks for individual games, which have been extraordinarily varied and highly effective.

Perhaps the most striking was the away game at Flamengo in the last 16 of the Sudamericana Cup. *La U* lined up with a back four, with two highly

Dominated...Ronaldinho and Flamengo could not cope with Lorenzetti (front) and his team-mates

Shut out...Acevedo (left) closes down LDU's Gonzalez

attacking full-backs in Matias Rodriguez and Jose Rojas, and the holding midfielder, Marcelo Diaz, sitting deep to cover. Vargas' habit of drifting in from the right flank placed him in exactly the area to exploit a 4-2-2-2 such as that played by the Brazilian side, making the most of the space, in the area behind the attacking full-back Junior Cesar, who is forced to get forward to provide width in what is otherwise a very narrow system.

Seemingly petrified of Vargas' pace, Flamengo sat deep, which gave Gustavo Lorenzetti, the Chilean side's playmaker, time and space, something augmented by the fact that, with Eugenio Mena and Charles Aranguiz to support him, *La U* had an extra man in central midfield.

> *La U* won the continental title in what is becoming recognised as the characteristic Chilean style

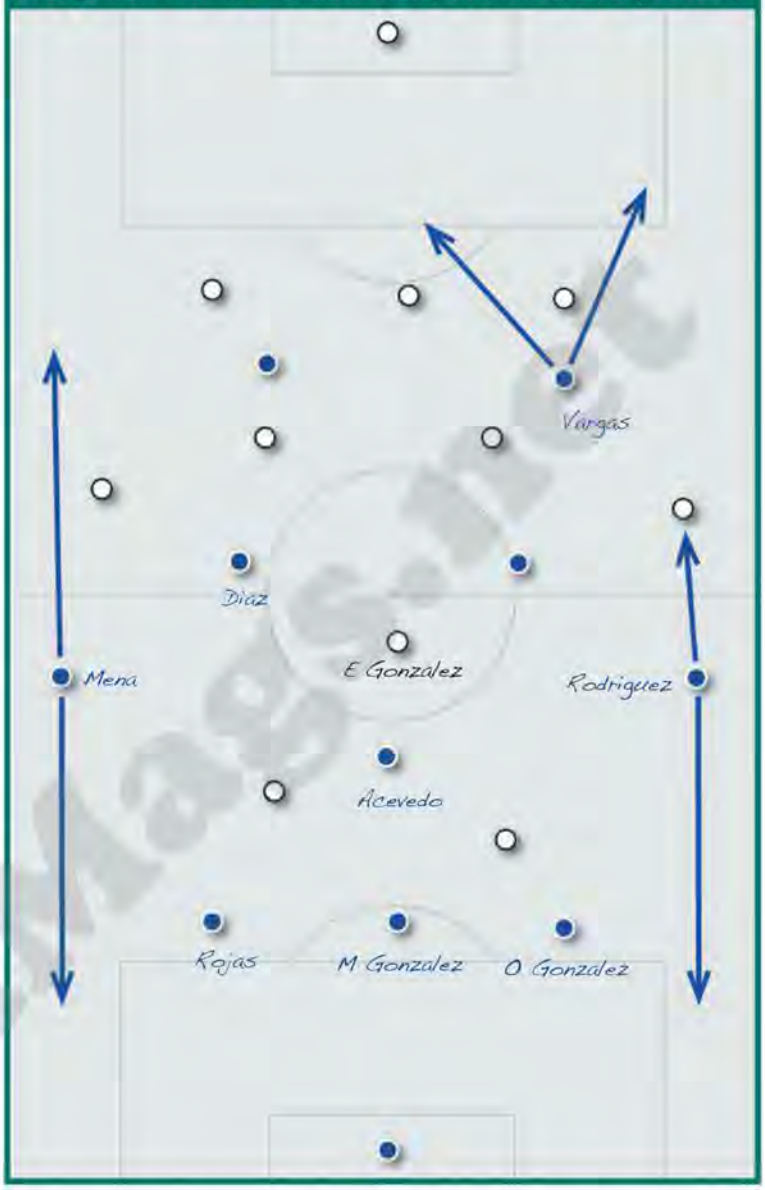
With full-back Rojas so attacking – he scored the opening goal from an attack channelled through Vargas' exploitation of the space behind Junior Cesar – there was perhaps a risk that Thiago Neves would be insufficiently looked after, but that's one of the subsidiary advantages of the high press: the game simply took place in another part of the pitch, restricted almost entirely to Flamengo territory.

La U won 4-0, but their domination was even more complete than that.

The same personnel started the quarter-final away to Arsenal de Sarandi, but Rojas was used as a third centre-back, with Mena taking on the wing-back role on the left flank. That meant the shape was effectively a 3-4-1-2, but with Diaz dropping deep to pick up Arsenal's Emilio Zelaya.

Away to Vasco da Gama in the first leg of the semi-final, *La U* used a lopsided 3-4-3, but lost control of the midfield. Sampaoli was preparing a change as Vasco took the lead after 33 minutes, but his switch, taking off Lorenzetti, who had looked lost in a deeper midfield role, to bring on Rodriguez and shift the more naturally deep-lying Aranguiz into the middle, turned the game, and his side found an equaliser 11 minutes from time.

LDU QUITO ● 0 1 ○ UNI DE CHILE, SUDAMERICANA, 08.12.11



Before the first leg of the Final, away to LDU Quito, the suggestion was that Sampaoli would opt for a comparatively defensive approach and play a 4-4-2. When his line-up was confirmed an hour before kick-off the assumption still was that *La U* would be playing 4-4-2. On the pitch, though, it soon became apparent that Albert Acevedo, who replaced the forward Francisco Castro, was playing not as a centre-back but just in front of the back three.

That may not sound like much, but it gave Sampaoli's side two clear advantages. For one thing, it meant Acevedo could pick up Ezequiel Gonzalez, LDU's playmaker. It also meant that *La U*'s two wing-backs, Rodriguez and Rojas, could play higher up the pitch and so engage LDU's wing-backs in their own half, again conducting the battle in opposition territory. *La U* weren't as emphatic as they had been in earlier rounds, but their 1-0 win – secured as Vargas, cutting in from the right, latched on to a Diaz through ball – was comfortable enough.

They completed the job with a comfortable 3-0 win at home, becoming the first Chilean side to win a continental competition in 20 years. More than that, though, they did it in what is becoming recognised as the characteristic Chilean style. Bielsa's time as national coach brought some fine performances and made Chile a side neutrals wanted to watch, but it also implanted a philosophy. It is that harvest that *La U* and Sampaoli are reaping. WS

Soccer Cities South of France

Peterjon Cresswell visits a region that plays host to some of France's most passionate supporters

Home to **Marseille** – the only French side to ever be crowned champions of Europe – the Stade Velodrome remains one of the continent's most atmospheric arenas. And as winners of five consecutive Ligue 1 championships – before the fifth in 1993 was later withdrawn after a match-fixing scandal – the club have also fielded some of the country's biggest names.

Jean-Pierre Papin, Marcel Desailly and Didier Deschamps, along with foreign imports Chris Waddle, Rudi Voller and Klaus Allofs, all represented *L'OM* in the late 1980s and early 1990s as flamboyant president Bernard Tapie brought some footballing glitz and glamour to the south coast.

But Marseille are not the region's only top-flight outfit, with **Montpellier** – who went into the winter break second in the table this season – and **Nice**, who were the dominant team of the 1950s, also making their mark.

Seven-times league champions **Monaco**, who were UEFA Champions League runners-up in 2004, have fallen from grace recently and now languish at the foot of Ligue 2. Meanwhile, **Nimes** and **Cannes** have both been in the top tier but are currently even further down the league pyramid.

NIMES

STADE DES COSTIERES

Opened in 1989 with an international between France and Holland, the stadium can hold nearly 30,000 spectators, with 18,000 seated. The stadium features East and West ends behind each goal, a South Stand under cover and a North Stand for press, VIPs and wealthier fans. The arena is set on avenue de la Bouvine, on the southern outskirts of town, near the main A9/E15 La Languedocienne road between Orange and Montpellier.

MONTPELLIER

STADE DE LA MOSSON

Built in 1972, the stadium was a surprise choice as a 1998 World Cup venue and its capacity of 16,000 was doubled to host six games. It is set on the north-western outskirts of town, at the terminus of tramway route 1, 15 stops from Corum, at the very opposite end of town to the airport. The ground comprises two, two-tiered ends, the Heidelberg and the Mosson, and multi-tiered seating in the Tribune d'Honneur and Tribune Presidentielle along each sideline, with the corners also filled in and used for seating. Tickets and souvenirs can be bought at the club's downtown store at Odysseum. The club also has a restaurant nearby, the Bistro de Grammont, at the very opposite end of tramway route 1.

LOCAL HEROES

Some of French football's most famous names started their careers down on the south coast. Zinedine Zidane and Patrick Vieira (both Cannes), Eric Cantona and Jean Tigana (Caillolais) and Laurent Blanc (Montpellier) all started down by the Mediterranean.

In fact, Cantona must have really enjoyed playing there as he also played for Marseille, Montpellier (on loan) and Nimes before heading off to England in 1992.

Local affair...Montpellier players get together (right) before their 1-0 win at home to Marseille in November

DIARY DATES

Italy's Internazionale visit the Stade Velodrome on February 22 for the first leg of their UEFA Champions League round of 16 clash with Marseille.

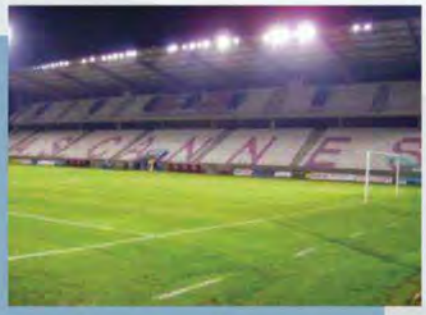
The stadium stages a more local affair when Montpellier visit on March 31, while *L'OM* travel to Nice a week earlier (March 24).

These days Monaco, Nimes and Cannes play in levels two, three and four respectively, with matches normally played on Fridays or Saturdays.

CANNES

STADE PIERRE DE COUBERTIN

This 12,000-capacity arena is a multi-sports venue on avenue Pierre Poesi, owned by the city and used by the football club since 1972. Tickets are a few euros for a place in the East or Presidential Stands, and even cheaper behind the goals in the North or South ends. It is close to Cannes-Mandelieu airport, in Cannes la Bocca, a few kilometres west of the main city of Cannes, one stop down the line on the Marseille-Ventimiglia service.



MONACO

STADE LOUIS II

Named after a Prince of Monaco, this is a 1980s construction, by the site of the original ground opened in 1939. Also used for UEFA Super Cup matches and athletics, the stadium sits on top of a car park and holds 18,500 all-seated – more than half the principality's population. It stands in the Fontevieille area of town, accessed via buses 5 and 6 behind the uncovered Cap d'Ail end.

NICE

STADE DU RAY

The modest, 19,000-capacity ground to the north of the city will remain Nice's home until they move to the 35,000 Grand Stade Nice in the summer of 2013. Opened in 1927 and renovated four times since, it has its own stop on tramline 1. Gare Thiers, close to the main train station, is five stops away.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

The area of France bordering the Atlantic Ocean is known as *le Midi*.

MARSEILLE

STADE VELODROME

Capable of holding 67,000 and averaging attendances this season of 40,000-plus, the Stade Velodrome is the biggest club stadium in France for capacity and crowds. Built for the 1938 World Cup, the ground also hosted several games at the 1998 competition, having ceded its cycle track in the 1960s. Along the main avenue from the nearest metro station, Rond Pont du Prado on line 2, are several bars filled with pre-match chatter.

CENTRAL DEFENDERS

Muscular presence...Mellberg of Sweden

Standard-bearers: big-name campaigners

Gladiator...Spain's Puyol

Reigning world and European champions Spain do not solely owe their dominance to their attacking panache and brilliant Barcelona-inspired short-passing game.

As well as the aesthetically pleasing, *La Roja* have substance and desire in abundance, and no player in their ranks has more of the gladiatorial about him than shaggy-haired Barca stalwart **CARLES PUYOL**. Although sometimes switched to right-back for club and country, he is much more effective in the middle of the action and Spain certainly cannot do without his legendary fighting spirit, leadership qualities, extraordinary mental strength and capacity to rise to the big occasion – such as his winner in the 2010 World Cup semi-final against Germany.

Long run...Mathijsen

It is incredible to think that Puyol was contemplating international retirement after the South African World Cup. At the age of 33, his competitive fire burns as bright as ever.

For most of his lengthy run – eight years and 78 caps – as a stopper for Holland, **JORIS MATHIJSEN** has rarely enjoyed universal approval, some believing he is too ponderous, others asserting that he is simply the best of a bad crop. But survive he has, and the fact that he performs far better on grass than on paper speaks volumes for his character and ability to silence the words of his critics. He and fellow central defender **JOHN HEITINGA** have a fine working relationship, each one able to

In the second of our series on the potential stars of Euro 2012, Nick Bidwell looks at the centre-backs who are likely to star in Poland and Ukraine

Central rock...Ireland's Dunne

nullify the weaker points of the other.

About to embark on his sixth major international tournament for Sweden, 34-year-old **OLOF MELLBERG** represents the very essence of his national team's stock-in-trade: muscular presence, aerial ability, extensive know-how and a dash of obduracy. An old chestnut is his lack of speed, but as he proved with Olympiakos in this season's Champions League, he has the know-how to avoid exposure.

Similarly uncomplicated is Republic of Ireland's **RICHARD DUNNE**, who currently plays for Mellberg's former club Aston Villa. Under coach Giovanni Trapattoni, the Irish have pulled down a steel curtain and Dunne fits the bill of no-nonsense gatekeeper perfectly.

Russia's experienced axis of **SERGEI IGNASHEVICH** and **VASILI BEREZUTSKY** are cut from an identical hard-wearing cloth.

With vastly experienced stopper Ricardo Carvalho falling out with Portugal coach Paulo Bento last year, **BRUNO ALVES** now has even more responsibility on his shoulders. The Zenit St Petersburg man is fearless both in the air and when making challenges, but can be undermined by his all-or-nothing instincts and a suspect temperament.

In qualification the Czech Republic had their own firewall in 27-year-old **ROMAN HUBNIK** of Hertha Berlin, while hosts Poland will be banking on the solidity of **ARKADIUS GLOWACKI** from Trabzonspor.

Fearless...Bruno Alves of Portugal

Experienced...Sergei Ignashevich of Russia

Work in progress: tough decisions needed

Making progress...Italy's Ogbonna

Most would assume that a team which conceded just two goals in 10 qualifying matches had all the central defensive insurance necessary. Yet the truth of the matter for Italy coach Cesare Prandelli is that he still has more questions than answers in this department. Although an automatic pick at the heart of the *Azzurri* rearguard, Juventus' indomitable **GIORGIO CHIELLINI** has been playing left-back for much of the current Serie A season, while the two youngsters Prandelli has often turned to – **LEONARDO BONUCCI** of Juve and Internazionale's **ANDREA RANOCCHIA** – are showing plenty of signs of fallibility.

Indomitable... Chiellini

Ranocchia blotted his copybook in November by giving away an extremely soft penalty in the 2-0 friendly win over Poland – fortunately for him, it was missed – and, like Bonucci, he does have a tendency to make errors of judgement, which is a cardinal sin in a tournament of such importance.

When push comes to shove, Prandelli may plump for another Juventus man in the shape of **ANDREA BARZAGLI**, a veteran of Italy's World Cup-winning campaign of 2006. Glad to be back in his homeland following a spell in the Bundesliga with Wolfsburg, the 30-year-old may not have the skills of Bonucci and Ranocchia but, on the evidence of this season, he is undoubtedly more reliable. Torino's **ANGELO OGBONNA**, an Italian of Nigerian descent who earned his first full cap last autumn, is making ground on the rails but, talented as he is, the fact that he plays in Serie B with Torino probably will count against him.

Germany's status as one of the favourites is, with all due respect, not based on the world-class qualities of their central defensive sentinels. More and more media pundits are of the opinion that long-standing first-choice **PER MERTESACKER** is past his prime and have real fears that his slowness on the turn, and increasingly jittery demeanour, could drag them down in Poland and Ukraine. While Germany coach Joachim Low is a huge admirer of his track record with the national side, his application, his discipline and character, all products have their shelf-life and the Arsenal man is perilously close to his expiry date.

Mertesacker's usual national team partner, **HOLGER BADSTUBER** of Bayern Munich, who has established himself in the side since the last World Cup, is not a risk-free choice either. Aged just 21 he still has much to learn and can be caught out of position on occasion. The time is fast approaching when Borussia Dortmund's **MATS HUMMELS** becomes an automatic selection and Schalke youngster **BENEDIKT HOWEDES** is knocking equally forcefully on the door. By way of contrast, World Cup 2010 regular **ARNE FRIEDRICH** of Wolfsburg looks to have reached the end of the international line, plagued by knee trouble.

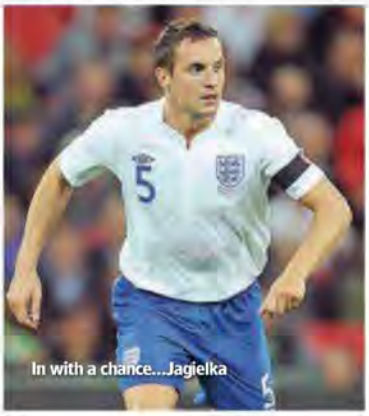
France boss Laurent Blanc has even more problems. Early on in his reign, he had every reason to be satisfied with the combination of **PHILIPPE MEXES** as sweeper alongside stopper **ADIL RAMI**, but in the last nine months the threads have started to unravel. Mexes snapped cruciate ligaments in the spring and Rami spectacularly went off the boil in the final qualifier, the 1-1 draw at home to Bosnia. What was once a certainty is

Under threat...Mertesacker

now a multi-handed scrum for the two slots. Barcelona's **ERIC ABIDAL**, **YOUNES KABOUL** of Tottenham Hotspur, **MAMADOU SAKHO** of Paris Saint-Germain and Laurent Koscielny (right) all are in with a fighting chance.

Uncertainty also abounds elsewhere, with England coach Fabio Capello seemingly uncertain of who to pair with skipper **JOHN TERRY**: the oft-injured **RIO FERDINAND**, **JOLEON LESCOTT**, **PHIL JAGIELKA** or the much in-demand **GARY CAHILL**?

With Denmark still to perm two from Roma's **SIMON KJAER**, **DANIEL AGGER** of Liverpool or Nordsjaelland's **ANDREAS BJELLAND**, and hosts Poland and Ukraine continuing to experiment, some tough decisions will have to be made soon.


In with a chance...Jagielka

On the up: the rising stars

Class act...Lovren

While no wide-eyed innocent – he is already 26 – Arsenal's **LAURENT KOSCIELNY** is very much at the dawn of his international career and could, with a fair wind at his back, end up on guard for France at the finals. With at least six individuals in competition for the two spots in the centre of *Les Bleus'* defence, he can, of course, take nothing for granted. But there are several reasons for him to be optimistic, not least his fine club form this season and the experience he has gained from participating in the Champions League for the last two years.

Eighteen months after switching from Ligue 1 side Lorient for the Premier League, he is maturing very nicely and long gone are the disastrous days of last term when he often looked dazed and confused. The new and improved Koscielny is far more resolute and switched on this season and, following four non-playing selections for Blanc's squad, he finally made his debut in a 1-0 friendly win over the USA at the Stade de France in November.

Improved...France's Koscielny

Ukraine coach Oleg Blohkin has been keen to run the rule over every possible candidate for a spot in his Euro 2012 squad and one player unlikely to miss out is young Shakhtar Donetsk star **YAROSLAV RAKITSKIY**, a highly-talented 22-year-old who is said to be interesting Juventus and a number of Premier League outfits. Excellent for the Ukraine under-21s at last year's European Championship – so much so that he was picked for the "team of the tournament" – he is versatile enough to look the part at left-back or as a midfield ball-winner. But he is even more proficient holding the back-line together with his intelligent reading of the game, uncompromising physicality and technical expertise. A full international for the past two years, he also boasts a strong left-foot shot and could well cause damage from free-kicks. In a Ukraine side arguably over-reliant on fading idols such as Andriy Shevchenko and Andriy Voronin, ambitious colts such as Rakitskiy will have to step forward.

Impressive...Papastathopoulos of Greece

As in their remarkable Euro 2004 triumph, Greece based their qualification for these finals on a miserly defence, conceding just five goals in total, and no one in their current back-line was impressive as 23-year-old **SOKRATIS PAPASTATHOPOULOS**, who together with **AVRAAM PAPADOPOULOS** formed a tough central defensive unit.

On a season-long loan at Werder Bremen from Genoa, Papastathopoulos' footballing intelligence, tenacity and incredible natural authority for someone so young have been there for all to see ever since he broke into the AEK Athens first-team five years ago. After being cut from Greece's Euro 2008 squad at the eleventh hour - he was the unfortunate 24th man - he will be doubly determined to make the most of the forthcoming main event.

Another in the coming-of-age category is Croatia's **DEJAN LOVREN**. Bought by Lyon from Dinamo Zagreb two years ago, he took some time to settle in but now looks a class act and is set for a big future. **WS**

Keir Radnedge

THE INSIDER

The expert view on events off the pitch

Platini warms to diplomatic role

UEFA president makes all the right noises on future FIFA position

Eyes on the prize... Platini is the man everyone wants to hear from

Star quality can be a wonderful weapon. Not everyone can adjust to the demands of celebrity status. Entertainment, politics and sport are all spheres which bring the best and worst out of its celebrities in achingly public ways.

One man who has used his fame to his advantage is Michel Platini. The UEFA president's own footballing fame means that when he talks, people listen. And that is significant in an era when football has been forced to confront an unprecedented invasion of the evils of corruption, match fixing, doping, racism and ongoing hooligan violence.

"Evils" is a little word which FIFA president Sepp Blatter has almost made his own. The "evils of society" pop up in all his homilies about football's role in the wider world. Platini steers clear of the phrase, but he is forthright in attacking negative influences whenever his fame provides a passport to address the political and legal decision-makers.

In meetings with the European Union's Council of Ministers and Sports Ministers, he informed the politicians that "match fixing, developing in line with the considerable online betting activity, represents one of the most serious threats facing sport today".

He said: "The growing number of fixed matches linked to betting is alarming; the more so because this scourge affects every discipline and no country is exempt from it.

"UEFA and the sports movement have doubled our efforts and initiative and courage to try to curb match fixing. But this scourge goes beyond our own abilities because it is a major field for organised crime. We cannot crusade against this on our own."

In seeking legislative and political support, however, Platini has taken a different route to his UEFA predecessor, Lennart Johansson.

The Swede believed that sport should be able to run its own affairs entirely free of the restraints of the laws which govern daily life. With the support of Blatter's FIFA, he led a movement to seek an exemption for sport within the European Union treaties.

Johansson, notoriously, was the UEFA president – and FIFA vice-president – who allowed the international game to be ambushed by the Bosman judgment in 1995. Some 12 years later Johansson was ambushed again, this time by Platini, in the UEFA presidential elections. He dismissed Platini as a hugely talented footballer lacking the intellect to score political goals in the corridors of power.

Platini, in his earlier days, thought that the Champions League should be turned back into a knockout competition; when he ran for UEFA president he learned about the commercial realities of professional sport. Similarly, unlike Johansson, he has learned that sport must work with the law and within the law if it is resist Blatter's "evils".

The way in which Platini has taken on board the importance of diplomacy has been evident in his latest comments about FIFA and speculation over the presidency if Blatter steps down in 2015.

Platini pointed out that both he and Blatter have three more years in their present roles. He says: "We can talk more calmly about these things at the end of my mandate. For now, I have not taken this decision."

Platini always sidesteps invitations to comment on some of Blatter's more outlandish comments, while cautioning that, in a "dangerous" political and financial wider world, "we need people who protect football". Good relations with the European Union were important for UEFA – "I am not above the law" – but less important for FIFA as "they represent only 27 countries out of 208".

And while Platini is forthright when talking about corruption assaults on football by outsiders, he is more guarded on the issue of corruption in high places.

"Here [at UEFA], there's none of it [corruption]," says Platini. "And there are people from here in FIFA and people who are not. There is a difference in terms of morality among people who come from different worlds: something which is forbidden here may, perhaps, be acceptable in other countries.

> The UEFA president's own footballing fame means that when he talks, people listen

"However, if any members of the executive committee have abused their roles within FIFA then, if they are caught, they should move on very quickly."

If Platini had Brazil's Ricardo Teixeira in mind, he would not say or even hint; he has challenges of his own, of course, with Financial Fairplay to implement. WS

Constantin against the rest of the world

Angry Sion president Christian Constantin is threatening to sue the Swiss federation for "millions of francs" and take his battle with the football authorities into as many more courts as his lawyers can find.

Constantin appears to have no intention of ceasing to wage war on FIFA and the Swiss FA, despite his club having been penalised 36 league points – on FIFA orders – in the long-running transfer-ban saga.

His preference for action in the civil courts, contrary to world federation statutes, stems from a belief that the Court of Arbitration for Sport is biased in favour of sports federations.

Constantin says: "It doesn't take much to understand how the system works. They want to take decisions which force you go to CAS – and lose there. CAS insists it's independent but no one is fooled."

The millionaire architect says he has the support of Europe's big clubs against a points punishment "which is more than clubs get for match fixing".

He plans to sue European members of the FIFA executive committee in the Zurich courts and members of the Swiss federation in Berne.

Constantin adds: "I have the backing of the biggest clubs including Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, president of the European Club Association.

"They have encouraged to fight on because they are unable to do so. No one should forget that it is the clubs who develop the players, who pay them and who support the livelihoods of all these associations' officials.

"These people enforce their diktats even though some of them are mired in corruption issues of their own.

"They should look around themselves: their days are numbered."

On a mission...the Sion president says he is fighting for justice

Spotlight could turn on Spain's Villar

Heir apparent...could Villar (left) be the man to follow in Platini's UEFA footsteps?

Just supposing that Michel Platini does fancy a run at the FIFA presidency in 2015, one possible successor in the European hot seat might be his fellow FIFA vice-president Angel Maria Villar.

The 61-year-old former Athletic Bilbao and Spain midfielder is about to be re-elected, unopposed, for a further four years at the head of the Spanish federation, a position he has held since 1988.

Villar is often underrated by outsiders despite having astutely balanced himself between the different centres of power within the Spanish game represented by Barcelona, Real Madrid and the rest.

Within FIFA, he has proved a loyal supporter of Sepp Blatter. At FIFA Congress in Zurich last June Villar made a characteristically personal, if somewhat rambling, speech of support.

Villar scored 11 goals in 361 games for Bilbao, his only senior club, with whom he won the Spanish Cup in 1973 and was UEFA runner-up in 1977. He went on to make 22 appearances for the national team, scoring three times.

In 1978 he was one of the founders of the Spanish players' union. Three years later he retired and rose swiftly up the administrative and political ladder. He was elected president of the Biscay football association and then of the Spanish federation a mere seven years after having retired from playing.

Villar has been a vice-president of UEFA since 1992 and of FIFA since 2000; – both of which are a solid foundation for whatever step he may wish to take next.

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Old Firm...Rangers' Kyle Lafferty (left) and Charlie Mulgrew of Celtic battle it out during their Scottish Premier League top-of-the-table clash

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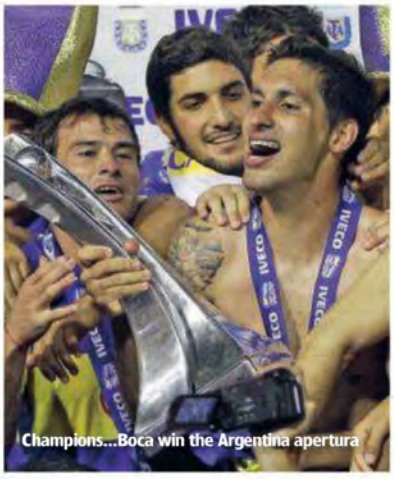


Champions...Boca win the Argentina apertura

Help...Eto'o may yet be saved

CAMEROON

Eto'o pays the price

National captain Samuel Eto'o was banned for 15 games by the Cameroon Football Federation for his role in the team's decision to boycott November's friendly in Algeria.

Reports claim that the country's president, Paul Biya, may step in and overturn the suspension.

CHILE

Five are banned

Defender Gonzalo Jara and midfielders Arturo Vidal, Carlos Carmona, Jorge Valdivia and Jean Beausejour were suspended from the national team for 10 games after they returned late and drunk from time off prior to a World Cup qualifier against Uruguay in November.

Poor show...Valdivia

CUBA

Centenary draw

The Cuban FA ended their celebration of 100 years of football on the island with a 1-1 draw against Costa Rica at the Estadio Pedro Marrero in Havana.

Cuba, who had never beaten their visitors in 14 previous meetings, were seconds away from victory when Kenny Cunningham

Internationals

CECAFA CUP

(Council for East and Central Africa Football Associations)

In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Group A

Nov 26
Tanzania 0
Rwanda 1 (Karekezi 23)
HT: 0-1

Nov 27
Zimbabwe 2 (Ngoma 9, Amini 73)
Djibouti 0
HT: 1-0

Nov 29
Rwanda 2 (Kagere 24, 82)
Zimbabwe 0
HT: 1-0

Nov 29
Tanzania 3 (Ulimwengu 2, Kazimoto 37, Javu 85)
Djibouti 0
HT: 2-0

Dec 2
Rwanda 5 (Bokota 3, Mugiraneza 57, Karekezi 78, 81, 86)
Djibouti 2 (Daoud 25, 34)
HT: 1-2

Dec 3
Tanzania 1 (Kazimoto pen 88)
Zimbabwe 2 (Ngoma 1, Nyoso og 11)
HT: 0-2

CECAFA CUP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rwanda	3	3	0	0	8	2	9
Zimbabwe	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Tanzania	3	1	0	2	4	3	3
Djibouti	3	0	0	3	2	10	0

Group B

Nov 25
Burundi 4 (Ndayisaba 30, Faty 45, Amissi 54, Ndayisenga 86)
Somalia 1 (Khalid pen 90+2)
HT: 2-0

Nov 25
Uganda 2 (Wagaluka 41, Sserumaga 77)
Zanzibar 1 (Badru Ali 47)
HT: 1-0

Nov 27
Zanzibar 0
Burundi 0

Nov 28
Somalia 0
Uganda 4 (Wagaluka 47, Okwi 57, 76, 90)
HT: 0-0
Sent off: Yasin Ali (Somalia); Mwesigwa (Uganda)

Dec 1
Somalia 0
Zanzibar 3 (Selembe 8, Omar 51, Morris 87)
HT: 0-1

Dec 1
Burundi 1 (Amissi 40)
Uganda 0
HT: 1-0

CECAFA CUP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burundi	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
Uganda	3	2	0	1	6	2	6
Zanzibar	3	1	1	1	4	2	4
Somalia	3	0	0	3	1	11	0

Group C

Nov 28
Sudan 1 (Tahir 8)
Ethiopia 1 (Kebede 34)
HT: 1-1

Nov 28
Kenya 0
Malawi 2 (J Banda 23, Kamwendo pen 62)
HT: 0-1

Nov 30
Ethiopia 0
Kenya 2 (Mugalia 11, V Ochieng 44)
HT: 0-2

Nov 30
Malawi 0
Sudan 0

Dec 2
Ethiopia 1 (Girma pen 16)
Malawi 1 (Kabichi 27)
HT: 1-1

Dec 3
Kenya 0
Sudan 1 (Koko 25)
HT: 0-1

CECAFA CUP – GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Malawi	3	1	2	0	3	1	5
Sudan	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Kenya	3	1	0	2	2	3	3
Ethiopia	3	0	2	1	2	4	2

Top 2 in each group and the 2 3rd-placed teams with the best record qualified for quarter-finals

Quarter-finals

Dec 5
Sudan 2 (Abdelnabi 41, Musa 60)
Burundi 0
HT: 1-0
Sent off: Abdalla (Sudan) 70min

Dec 5
Rwanda 2 (Mugiraneza 38, Kagere 88)
Zanzibar 1 (Mohammed 47)
HT: 1-0

Dec 6
Uganda 1 (Kizza 15)
Zimbabwe 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 6
Tanzania 1 (Bakari 37)
Malawi 0
HT: 1-0

Semi-finals

Dec 8
Rwanda 2 (Iranzi 6, Karekezi 78)
Sudan 1 (Agab 68)
HT: 1-0

Dec 8
Uganda 3 (Mwesigwa 56, Okwi 102, Isinde pen 112)
Tanzania 1 (Ngassa 17)
Aet. **HT:** 0-1. **90mins:** 1-1

3rd-place play-off

Dec 10
Sudan 1 (Eldin 84)
Tanzania 0
HT: 0-0

Final

Dec 10
Rwanda 2 (Kagere 51, 79)
Uganda 2 (Isinde 77, Karekezi og 80)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 2-2
Uganda 3-2 on pens

Previous winners

(15 most recent)

1994	Tanzania
1995	Zanzibar
1996	Uganda
1997-98	*not held*
1999	Rwanda 'B'
2000	Uganda
2001	Ethiopia
2002	Kenya
2003	Uganda
2004	Ethiopia
2005	Ethiopia
2006	Zambia*
2007	Sudan
2008**	Uganda
2009	Uganda
2010	Tanzania

**Trophy awarded to runners-up Sudan because Zambia were a guest team*
***Originally scheduled for November 2008 but actually played in January 2009*

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP

(South Asian Football Federation)

In New Delhi, India

Group A

Dec 3
India 1 (Chhetri 10)
Afghanistan 1 (Arezou 5)
HT: 1-1

Dec 3
Sri Lanka 3 (Zain 29, Bandara 35, 65)
Bhutan 0
HT: 2-0

Dec 5
Sri Lanka 1 (Zain 12)
Afghanistan 3 (Ahmadi 24, 35, Ali 78)
HT: 1-2

Dec 5
India 5 (Nabi 29, Miranda 44, 58, Chhetri 69, 84)
Bhutan 0
HT: 2-0

Dec 7
Bhutan 1 (Gyeltshen 22)
Afghanistan 8 (Yamrali 4, Amiri 10, Arezou 15, 18, 45+2, 83, Sharityar pen 48, Mashriqi 70)
HT: 1-5

Dec 7
India 3 (Lalpekhlua 50, Chhetri 70, Warakagoda og 90+3)
Sri Lanka 0
HT: 0-0

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Afghanistan	3	2	1	0	12	3	7
India	3	2	1	0	9	1	7
Sri Lanka	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
Bhutan	3	0	0	3	1	16	0

Group B

Dec 2
Bangladesh 0
Pakistan 0

Dec 2
Maldives 1 (Ashfaq 45+2)
Nepal 1 (S Rai 51)
HT: 1-0

Dec 4
Bangladesh 0
Nepal 1 (S Thapa 90+5)
HT: 0-0

Dec 4
Maldives 0
Pakistan 0

Dec 6
Pakistan 1 (Ishaq pen 48)
Nepal 1 (Khawas 36)
HT: 0-1

Dec 6
Maldives 3 (Tariq 6, 16, Ashfaq 70)
Bangladesh 1 (Shahed 30)
HT: 2-1

Regional No1...India celebrate

equalised two minutes into second-half stoppage time to cancel out Hevier Cordovez's penalty.

INDIA

Sixth regional title

The hosts and defending champions won the SAFF Championship for a sixth time, beating Afghanistan 4-0 in the Final.

Sunil Chhetri, Clifford Miranda, Jeje Lalpekhlua and Sushil Singh were all on target as India finished a disappointing 2011 on a high, following their failure to progress beyond the group stage in January's Asian Cup and elimination from the World Cup qualifiers at the hands of United Arab Emirates.

Chhetri, who had a week's trial with Scottish champions Rangers prior to the competition, was the tournament's top scorer with seven goals.

SWAZILAND

No more Nations Cup

Swaziland pulled out of the 2013 African Nations Cup just a week before they were due to play Seychelles in the first leg of their preliminary round clash. Citing financial constraints for their withdrawal, they now face the possibility of being banned from the 2015 tournament.

UGANDA

Spot on in the Final

After twice coming from behind in the CECAFA Cup Final to draw 2-2, Uganda beat Rwanda on penalties. Andrew Mwesigwa scored the winning spot-kick.

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maldives	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
Nepal	3	1	2	0	3	2	5
Pakistan	3	0	3	0	1	1	3
Bangladesh	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

Top 2 in both groups qualified for semi-finals

Semi-finals

Dec 9
Maldives 1 (Qasim 60)
India 3 (Nabi 24, Chhetri pen 70, 90+1)
HT: 0-1

Dec 9
Afghanistan 1 (Arezou 101)
Nepal 0
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 0-0

Final

Dec 11
India 4 (Chhetri pen 71, Miranda 79, Lalpekhlua 80, S Singh 90+5)
Afghanistan 0
HT: 0-0
Sent off: Yousufzari (Afghanistan) 70min

Previous winners

1993	India
1995	Sri Lanka
1997	India
1999	India
2003	Bangladesh
2005	India
2008	Maldives
2009	India U-23

PAN-ARAB GAMES

In Qatar

Group A

Dec 10 - Doha
Qatar 2 (Al Marri 17, Razak 34)
Bahrain 2 (Al Husaini 71, 89)
HT: 2-0

Dec 13 - Doha
Bahrain 3 (Al Hardan 41, Abdullatif pen 63, 70)
Iraq 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 16 - Doha
Qatar 0
Iraq 0

PAN-ARAB GAMES – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bahrain	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
Qatar	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Iraq	2	0	1	1	0	3	1

Group B

Dec 11 - Al Rayyan
Saudi Arabia 0
Oman 0

Dec 14 - Al Rayyan
Oman 0
Kuwait 2 (Nasser 81, 90+2)
HT: 0-0

Dec 17 - Al Rayyan
Saudi Arabia 0
Kuwait 2 (Al Kandari 45+1, Al Mutawa pen 85)
HT: 0-1

PAN-ARAB GAMES – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kuwait	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
Oman	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Saudi Arabia	2	0	1	1	0	2	1

Group C

Dec 11 - Doha
Libya 0
Sudan 1 (Ankba 81)
HT: 0-0

Dec 11 - Doha
Jordan 4 (Khalid 14, Deeb pen 23, 33, Al Dardour 83)
Palestine 1 (Nu'man 34)
HT: 3-1
Sent off: Amour, Abu Saleh (both Palestine)

Dec 14 - Doha
Sudan 0
Jordan 0

Dec 14 - Doha
Palestine 1 (Zatara 88)
Libya 1 (Boussefi 41)
HT: 0-1

Dec 17 - Doha
Sudan 0
Palestine 2 (El Khatib 39, Amour 62)
HT: 0-1

Dec 17 - Doha
Libya 0
Jordan 0

PAN-ARAB GAMES – GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jordan	3	1	2	0	4	1	5
Palestine	3	1	1	1	4	5	4
Sudan	3	1	1	1	1	2	4
Libya	3	0	2	1	1	2	2

The 3 group winners and the runner-up in Group C (the only 4-team group) qualified for semi-finals

Semi-finals

Dec 20 - Doha
Bahrain 3 (Al Alawi 6, Isa 44, Abu Saleh og 58)
Palestine 1 (Nu'man pen 40)
HT: 2-1

Dec 20 - Doha
Kuwait 0
Jordan 2 (Deeb 96, pen 119)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 0-0

3rd-place play-off

Dec 22
Palestine 0
Kuwait 3 (Al Moussawi 92, Al Rashidi 94, Al Mutawa 119)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 0-0

Final

Dec 23
Bahrain 1 (Abdullatif 89)
Jordan 0
HT: 0-0

ABCS TOURNAMENT

(acronym of participants: Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao & Surinam)

In Paramaribo, Surinam

Semi-finals

Dec 2
Curacao 1 (Bito 10)
Bonaire 3 (Kunst 25, Calvenhoven 72, Piar 87)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Wijngaarde (Sur)

Dec 2
Surinam 0
Aruba 0
Ref: Jauregui (Cur)
Aruba 5-4 on pens

3rd-place play-off

Dec 4
Curacao 0
Surinam 2 (Baneti, Limon)

Final

Dec 4
Bonaire 2 (Kunst 34, Janzen 45)
Aruba 2 (Bergen 50, Gomez 53)
HT: 2-0
Bonaire 4-3 on pens

FRIENDLIES

Tuesday, November 29

Nov 29 - Margao
India 0
Zambia 5 (Chisenga 14, Sitali 56, Musakanya 69, 72, 90)
HT: 0-1

Tuesday, December 6

Dec 6 - Muharraq
Bahrain 0
Palestine 1 (El Khatib 66)
HT: 0-0

Sunday, December 11

Dec 11 - Havana
Cuba 1 (Cordoves pen 58)
Costa Rica 1 (Cunningham 90+2)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lopez (Gtm)
Cuba: Cooper - Corrales, Dranguet, Clavelo, Gomez (Garcia 85), Francisco, Cervantes, Urgelles, R Fernandez, S Fernandez (Martinez 73), Cordoves (Linares 87).
Costa Rica: Grant - Myrie, Umana, Miller, Leal, Brenes, Lopez (Valverde 46), Tejeda (Estrada 69), Wallace (Segares 69), Arrieta (Cunningham 69), Urena (Nelson 46).

Wednesday, December 14

Dec 14 - Cabinda
Angola 1 (Love 21)
Cameroon 1 (Momasso 40)
HT: 1-1

Sunday, December 18

Dec 18 - Dundo
Angola 1 (Love 59)
Zambia 0
HT: 0-0

Wednesday, December 21

Dec 21 - Rustenburg, South Africa
Botswana 3 (Ramatlhakwane x2, Moloi)
Lesotho 0

Dec 21 - La Serena
Chile 3 (Pinto 19, pen 62, 74)
Paraguay 2 (Benitez pen 52, Manzur 56)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Orosco (Bol)
Chile: Marin - Delgado (Godoy 73), Casanova, Dominguez, M Contreras, Martinez, Reyes (M Gutierrez 83), Campos Toro, Vidangossy (Romo 73), Fernandes (Ubilla 86), Pinto (Monje 76).
Sent off: M Contreras 51min.
Paraguay: D Barreto - Bonet (Dos Santos 63), Benegas, Manzur (L Cardozo 71), Bartomeus, Ayala (Caballero 78), Oviedo, Aquino (Torales 23), Benitez (Bareiro 70), Zeballos (Melgarejo 42), Nunez.
Sent off: Oviedo 86min.

Thursday, December 22

Dec 22 - Lubango
Angola 0
Namibia 0

Dec 22 - Cabudare
Venezuela 0
Costa Rica 2 (Wallace 42, Cubero 52)
HT: 0-1
Venezuela: Liebeskind - A Gonzalez (Rivero 44), Perozo, Velazquez, Cichero (Rouga 80), Mea Vitali, F Flores (Chourio 60), Pena (Guerra 60), Perez Greco, Renteria (Martinez 75), Machis (Palomino 60).
Costa Rica: Cambronero - Myrie, Gonzalez, Miller, Segares, Tejeda (Valverde 67), Cubero, Wallace (Leal 73), Cunningham, Brenes (Guevara 87), McDonald (Arrieta 76).

2013 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS

Preliminary round

Sao Tome e Principe v Lesotho
1st leg - Jan 6, 2012; 2nd leg - Jan 20, 2012

Seychelles v Swaziland –
Swaziland withdrew; Seychelles walkover

1st round draw

Burundi v Zimbabwe
Central African Republic v Egypt
Chad v Malawi
Congo v Uganda
Ethiopia v Benin
Gambia v Algeria
Guinea-Bissau v Cameroon
Kenya v Togo
Liberia v Namibia
Madagascar v Cape Verde Islands
Rwanda v Nigeria
Sao Tome e Principe OR Lesotho v Sierra Leone
Seychelles v DR Congo
Tanzania v Mozambique
1st legs - Feb 29, 2012; 2nd legs - June 15-17, 2012

Winners qualify for 2nd round

2nd round

Direct qualifiers
(the 16 finalists from the 2012 African Nations Cup)
Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia

The 30 2nd round countries will be drawn in 15 head-to-head ties, the winners of which will qualify for the finals

1st legs - Sep 7-9, 2012; 2nd legs - Oct 12-14, 2012

Hosts South Africa qualify for finals automatically

CLUB WORLD CUP
Imperious Barcelona sweep Santos aside

In the long run...Messi (right) gets the better of Neymar in the Club World Cup Final

Proof, if any were needed, that Barcelona are the best side on the planet was provided in Yokohama as the European champions swept past Santos of Brazil to claim the Club World Cup for a second time.

Goals from *World Soccer's* World Player of the Year Lionel Messi (two), Xavi and Cesc Fabregas gave Barcelona an imperious 4-0 victory over Santos in the Final.

Santos had made the competition their priority since winning the Libertadores Cup in June, and there were high hopes that their young talents Neymar and Paulo Henrique Ganso could provide Barcelona with meaningful intercontinental opposition as the tournament returned to Japan after two years in the United Arab Emirates. Ultimately, though, Santos were overwhelmed by Barcelona's attacking brilliance.

"They were like artists," said Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola afterwards in tribute to his players, although he refused to single out any of his side for specific praise. "There is no special secret to our success. I've tried to get the players to work together as a team and use the strengths they have. Our players have been playing very well, but it's important to keep that level going."

When asked about his formation, he replied: "I don't think we were playing 3-7-0; that's just how we play. We try to control the midfield and exploit space."

Santos coach Muricy Ramalho was gracious in defeat, saying: "Barcelona have played various teams around the world and nobody can beat them. Eventually some team may, but I don't think it's possible now.

"This was not embarrassing and it was not a blow to us. We need to be humble – we were beaten by the best team in the world."

Ramalho acknowledged that Messi was the world's best player, but clung to his belief that Santos teenager Neymar could overtake him one day.

Neymar also admitted Santos had been outplayed, adding: "It's impossible to stop Barcelona. They are the best team in the world with fantastic players. But we are the second-best team in the world and for us that is a great reward."

The Final in Yokohama's International Stadium had been billed as a clash between Messi and Neymar but the mercurial 19-year-old Brazilian failed to rise to the occasion.

Neymar had scored a wonderful goal when Santos beat Kashiwa Reysol in the semi-final, but against Barcelona he was a peripheral figure. "We wanted to suffocate the supply to Neymar, who we know is a dangerous player," said Guardiola.

Messi steals the show

Instead it was Messi who shone the brightest. The Argentinian had the first proper effort on goal, forcing a save from Santos goalkeeper Rafael Cabral after 13 minutes. Four minutes later, Barcelona took the lead - inevitably through Messi, who collected an angled pass from Xavi and delicately chipped the ball over Cabral from close range.

The early momentum was with attack-minded Barca and Xavi extended the European champions' lead seven minutes later. Full-back Dani Alves, playing mostly on the right wing, cut inside and played the ball to Xavi, who shot past Cabral.

Fabregas, the midfielder signed from Arsenal in the summer, was increasingly influential and scored the third goal on the stroke of half-time. Minutes earlier, he struck a post when played through by Xavi.

Neymar's influence was restricted throughout the first half, but the teenager had a chance to score on the hour when played clean through on goal, Victor Valdes saving well with his legs.

Eight minutes from time, Messi capped a memorable performance with his second goal, and Barcelona's fourth, when Dani Alves threaded the ball through to him. He danced round Cabral and walked the ball in.

The Final was watched by a sell-out 68,166 crowd and Japanese FA president Junji Ogura was quick to point out that attendances were up on last year's event.

"More than 300,000 people attended this year's tournament," he said. "It attracted 200,000 to the UAE last year."

Japan will host the competition in 2012 before it heads to Morocco for 2013 and 2014, but they hope to be hosts again in 2015. "I want to work hard to help bring the event back to Japan," added Ogura. "I want to let people in Japan see how the world's top clubs are."

The presence of J.League champions Kashiwa Reysol helped to boost crowds in the early rounds, when games were again held as double headers.

Kashiwa comfortably beat Auckland City 2-0 in the tournament's opening match to set up a quarter-final against CONCACAF club champions Monterrey. The Mexicans proved to be a much tougher proposition than the New Zealanders and the quarter-final went to penalties after extra-time could not break the 1-1 stalemate.

Both sides had missed chances in the first half, with Humberto Suazo spurning an opportunity for

> "We need to be humble – we were beaten by the best team in the world"
>
> **Santos coach Muricy Ramalho**

Double strike...Al Sadd's Obaid (centre) puts his side two up against Esperance

Monterrey and Junya Tanaka heading wide for Kashiwa.

Tanaka made amends early in the second half when he crossed for Leandro Domingues to score the opening goal, but Monterrey replied five minutes later through Suazo. That was it as far as chances went, but in the shoot-out Kashiwa keeper Takanori Sugeno saved Monterrey's opening

Hero...Hayashi hugs keeper Sugeno

spot-kick before Ryohei Hayashi smashed home the winning kick to set up a semi-final meeting with Santos. Earlier in the same stadium, Asian club champions Al Sadd produced something of an upset when they beat African champions Esperance.

Taking their chances

The Qataris were second best for much of the game as they struggled to deal with Esperance's best player, Youssef Msakni, but they took their chances as the Tunisians squandered theirs.

First, Khalfan Ibrahim took advantage of Moez Ben Cherifia's failure to hold on to a shot from Kader Keita to put Al Sadd ahead after 34 minutes.

Then Al Sadd doubled their lead early in the second half, when Abdulla Obaid Koni turned in Lee Jung-soo's header from Nadir Belhadj's free-kick.

Esperance pulled a goal back through Ousama Darragi but struggled to find the equaliser, even though Yannick Ndjeng had an effort disallowed for offside.

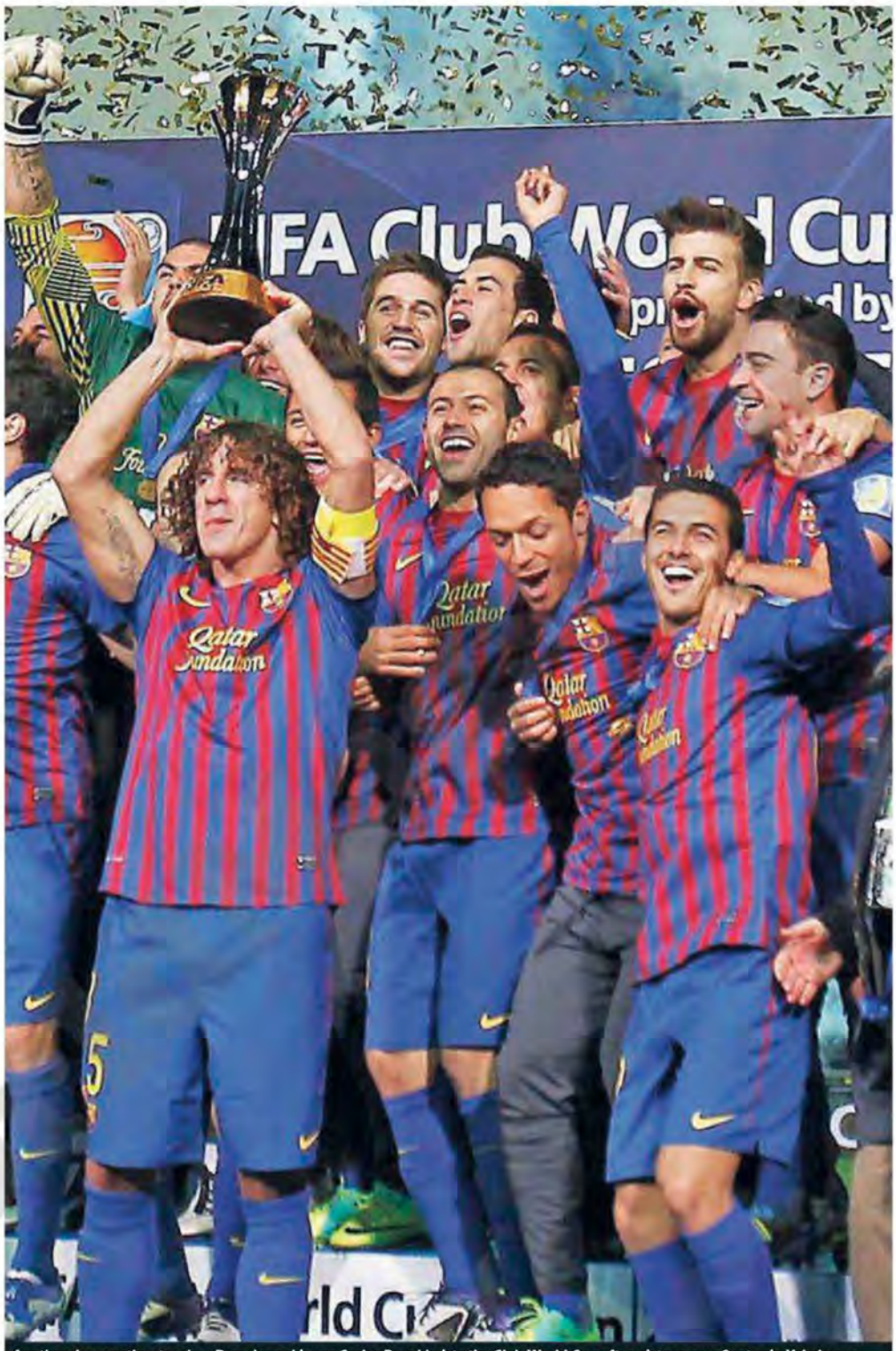
In the semi-finals, Barcelona brushed aside Al Sadd with a 4-0 victory in which all the goals were scored by defensive-minded players. Adriano hit two with Maxwell and Seydou Keita also on target. However, the win was overshadowed by the injury suffered by David Villa. The 30-year-old Spain striker broke a shin bone after landing awkwardly in the 37th minute and now faces a race to be fit for the Euro 2012 finals in June.

Santos, meanwhile, outclassed Kashiwa in the other semi-final, with goals from Neymar, Borges and Danilo. For the opening goal, Neymar curled a wonderful shot into the top corner. Borges drove home a second from the edge of the area in the 24th minute, but Hiroki Sakai gave Reysol a lifeline with a powerful header early in the second half.

Danilo bent a brilliant free-kick around the wall in the 63rd minute, and substitute Ibson almost added a fourth, his effort rattling the crossbar. Kashiwa coach Nelsinho, who was sacked by Santos in 2005, said: "We've played three matches in eight days. We created chances but paid for not taking them."

The nature of Santos' victory heightened expectations that they could beat Barca in the Final. But, with Messi at his brilliant best, those fanciful notions were soon blown away.

John Holmesdale



Another day, another trophy...Barcelona skipper Carles Puyol hoists the Club World Cup after victory over Santos in Yokohama

ARGENTINA
Boca back to winning ways

No stopping them...Boca striker Cvitanich (second right) is mobbed by team-mates after scoring against Banfield in a 3-0 win in the game that clinched the apertura championship

"If they don't like how we play, they can change the channel," said Boca Juniors coach Julio Falcioni, who was in no mood to explain himself the day before his side wrapped up the apertura to end three years without silverware at the club.

It is sometimes hard to find anything but football on Argentinian television – the result of the current TV deal, where the government owns the rights, is that up to four channels often show the same game – but Falcioni nonetheless made his point. He was here to win, and nobody was forced to watch. If people didn't like what they were seeing, they could always turn over to the *telenovela*.

Boca promptly commanded a 20.1 per cent share of the TV ratings during their title-clinching match against Banfield. But for all the fireworks, the smiles, the medals and the scantily clad dancers parading around the Bombonera to celebrate the title, there was little hiding the fact that it was a far from vintage season.

Boca's 24th league title was particularly sweet for their supporters with the sight of River Plate in the second division, but elsewhere there was little to cheer about. And it wasn't just Boca's utilitarianism that was under review as the next teams in the league all ended the season 12 points behind the leaders, depriving the campaign of a serious title challenge. Pre-season favourites stumbled early on, while the exodus of players continued and 11 coaches – some of whom only started midway through the season – lost their jobs.

Where Levante's early rise to the top of the table in Spain was greeted as a plucky odds-defying David to Real Madrid and Barcelona's Goliath, a similar situation was greeted with disgust in Argentina. The sight of the promoted teams performing strongly offered the proof, or so went the argument, that there is little difference between the second and first division.

Only a late slump in form removed Atletico Rafaela from the second place they had occupied up until matchday 13. Belgrano, meanwhile, who swapped divisions with River Plate after last season's relegation play-off, enjoyed a late surge that pushed them up to fourth.

Amid this perceived mediocrity there was no time to argue over aesthetics at Boca. Having steered Banfield to their first title in 2009, Falcioni was the no-nonsense coach handed the task of rebuilding a championship-winning side.

In came goalkeeper Agustin Orion, who had already won titles with San Lorenzo and Estudiantes, while Rolando Schiavi, despite his advanced age of 38, defied the sceptics and was installed as the

Trophy time...Boca coach Falcioni

defensive leader. Facundo Roncaglia returned from loan and settled in at right-back, while Clemente Rodriguez rediscovered his form, working effectively with Juan Roman Riquelme on his escapades up the left flank. Juan Manuel Insaurralde completed the back line in a record-breaking defence that was the bedrock of a championship side.

Clean sheets

Boca ended the season unbeaten, conceding just six goals in 19 games with 14 clean sheets, and ended a record 12 points ahead of second-placed Racing. Yet in doing so they managed to score only a modest 25 goals. After losing Lucas Viatri to injury, Dario Cvitanich was the side's top scorer with five goals, pointing to a trend across the league.

The apertura averaged less than two goals a game, compared to 2.6 in Brazil and a fraction under three in Chile – the two countries that provided the South American champions of 2011 (Santos in the Libertadores and Universidad in the Sudamericana). Just as Boca pulled away from the chasing pack at the top of the table, so too did Ruben Ramirez of Godoy Cruz as top scorer, with 12. The nearest challengers were Santiago Salcedo (Argentinos Juniors), Mauro Matos (All Boys) and Cesar Pereyra (Belgrano) all on seven.

Much had been expected of Racing under Diego Simeone, especially with their Colombian double act of Teo and Gio. Yet while Teo Gutierrez ended the previous season as joint-top scorer on 11, in the apertura he managed just six. And Gio Moreno is still some distance from recapturing the inspiration and drive he showed before rupturing knee ligaments, an injury that kept him out of the Copa America.

Despite one of the strongest squads in the country, Racing's mid-season dip, with eight draws in 10 matches, allowed Boca to pull away. With goalkeeper Sebastian Saja returning from Greece and in fine form, they conceded only two more than Boca. But scoring just 16 goals in 19 matches meant they failed to qualify for the Libertadores Cup. Days after the close of the tournament Simeone departed amid rumours of a rift with the board – not to mention a job offer with Atletico Madrid in Spain.

Having sold the attacking trio of Santiago Silva, Maxi Moralez and Ricky Alvarez in pre-season, reigning champions Velez also suffered a poor mid-season, distracted by a run in the Sudamericana Cup which ended at the hands of LDU Quito at the semi-final stage.

Veron playing on

Estudiantes' only solace, meanwhile, came at the end of the campaign when Juan Sebastian Veron announced he was delaying his retirement by six months. The news was celebrated as if the club had won the championship itself, the squad donning *"gracias Bruja"* T-shirts on the final day of the season. After a miserable few months, which included spending two weeks bottom of the table, it was the best possible news.

Simeone was one of 11 coaches to lose their jobs, with Miguel Angel Russo (Estudiantes), Omar De Felipe (Olimpo), Omar Asad (San Lorenzo), Sebastian Mendez (Banfield), Pedro Troglio (Argentinos Juniors), Javier Torrente (Newell's) and Antonio Mohamed (Independiente) joined by Jorge Da Silva (Godoy Cruz), Diego Cagna (Newell's) and Ricardo Lavolpe (Banfield) after the season ended.

While the cases of Cagna – in charge for just nine games – and Lavolpe (14) are alarming, the wider situation at San Lorenzo is even more so. Finishing 17th after 10 defeats, with no money and a supporter bursting into the dressing room after a training session to land punches on centre-back Jonathan Botinelli, the club are in the relegation play-off zone. They need an impeccable 2012 clausura campaign – a tall order for coach Leo Madelon – to avoid following River Plate into the play-offs and possibly becoming the second *grande* to go down in as many years.

While San Lorenzo fret over points averages, 2012 offers Boca a return to the Libertadores after a two-year absence. Velez, Lanus and Arsenal de Sarandi will join them in the competition.

As clubs prepare for the 2012 clausura, there are again whispers of changes around the corner. The apertura began with the proposal to merge the first and second divisions, and ended with rumours that the "long season" format will return as of 2012-13. Whether changing the format makes more fans turn on the TV remains to be seen.

Joel Richards

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PLAYER OF THE SEASON
SEBASTIAN SAJA
(Racing)
Fellow keeper Agustin Orion may have broken the record for the fewest goals conceded at Boca, but Saja was considerably busier and just as impressive after returning to Argentina from AEK Athens.

COACH OF THE SEASON
JULIO FALCIONI
(Boca Juniors)
Serious and superstitious, he developed a formidable unit at Boca as he won his second title as a coach.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
FRANCO VAZQUEZ
(Belgrano)
The exciting 22-year-old attacking midfielder insisted on staying an extra six months to fulfil his dream of playing top-flight football for his club, with whom he won promotion, before moving to Palermo in Italy.

Fine form...Saja was hard to beat

Holding midfielder...Boca's Diego Rivero is blocked off by Lucas Parodi of Belgrano

Agony...San Lorenzo's Bernardo Romeo

CHILE
Universidad de Chile reign supreme

Champions once more...Universidad de Chile lift their 15th league title after beating Cobreloa 3-0 on aggregate in the apertura Final

Jorge Sampaoli's exciting tactics and the goals of strike sensation Eduardo Vargas gave Universidad de Chile a year to remember, as they scooped a Chilean record of three titles in one season.

The pinnacle, naturally, was winning the Sudamericana Cup, their first-ever international trophy and only the second to be won by a Chilean club side, coming 20 years after Colo Colo picked up the Libertadores Cup.

But while the 11 goals scored by Vargas in the Sudamericana may have been the best-ever haul by a player in a single edition of the tournament, he was not the top scorer in the domestic league. His team-mate Francisco Castro managed two more than Vargas to lead the charts with eight.

La U won both domestic championships in 2011, clinching the apertura at the end of a tight race with Universidad Catolica, who had dominated the previous year. They then made a record-breaking start to the clausura, winning their first nine matches, scoring 24 goals and conceding only three. Despite their form falling away, they were still only beaten once – 2-1 by Catolica in the second leg of their semi-final – as they marched on to the Final.

That loss to Catolica marked the end of a 36-match unbeaten run that followed a 2-0 defeat in July by Primera B side Magallanes in the Chile Cup – a competition eventually won by Catolica who beat Magallanes in the Final.

In the clausura title decider, *La U* drew 0-0 in the first leg against Cobreloa with Vargas absent from the line-up against his former club through suspension. Back for the return, the star striker was on target in a 3-0 victory in his last match before a move to Napoli.

It was the Santiago club's 15th league title, consolidating their place behind Colo Colo (with 29) as the second-most successful team in Chilean football history.

Sampaoli's side were characterised by their daring form away from home, particularly in the Sudamericana Cup. A 4-0 win over Ronaldinho's Flamengo in Rio de Janeiro earned them many plaudits, including one from the Madrid daily *El Pais* who proclaimed them the "Barcelona of the Americas". In the Final they beat 2009 Sudamericana winners LDU Quito, earning a highly creditable 1-0 first leg win in the high altitude of the Ecuadoran capital, before coasting to a 3-0 victory back in Santiago.

Sampaoli put his team's success down to the capacity for work of his young squad and their self-belief. But he faced the reality as soon as the season was over that he might lose several of his players in the transfer market and that he may have to start building a team from scratch for the 2012 apertura.

"Although this was a very good year, in the next we hope to count on a group of players similar to the one we have today," he said. "Now everything we did starts again.

"There'll be a group of players that will have to start from zero, for which it will be very important to be well prepared."

Rex Gowar

For final league table, see page 111

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
EDUARDO VARGAS
(Universidad de Chile)
The 22-year-old scored a record 11 goals in the Sudamericana Cup before signing for Italian side Napoli. Sampaoli had successfully moved him up front from a deeper role behind Gustavo Canales and Francisco Castro.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
FELIPE MORA (Audax Italiano)
The 18-year-old schemer helped his side finish fourth in the clausura and he was called up by Chile coach Claudio Borghi to a squad of home-based players for a friendly against Paraguay in December.

COACH OF THE SEASON
JORGE SAMPAOLI
(Universidad de Chile)
A big fan of fellow Argentinian Marcelo Bielsa – Chile's former national coach – he won over an initially sceptical media and gained many admirers with an attacking game based on possession and quick passing.

Gone...Vargas is now in Serie A

COLOMBIA
Junior triumph as America go down

Going to ground...happy Junior hail their Colombian title win after beating Once Caldas on penalties in the knockout stage Final

For a second successive season the Colombian title was decided on penalties, with Junior crowned champions after victory over Once Caldas in the knockout stage Final.

Goalkeeper Sebastian Viera was Junior's hero, saving Guillermo Beltran's spot kick to give his side a 5-3 win after the sides had drawn 4-4 over the two legs.

Junior's dramatic triumph was, however, partially overshadowed by the relegation of the country's most successful team.

Four-times Libertadores Cup finalists America of Cali were once one of South America's most feared cubs. But next season, for the first time in their 84-year history, the Red Devils will endure the ignominy of playing in the second division.

A promotion-relegation play-off defeat – again on penalties – by second-tier Patriotas may have signalled the darkest day in the 13-time champions' history, but many had seen the demise coming.

During the 1980s and 90s the Cali drug cartel washed its dirty money in the football club. And while the funds helped secure America's crowning glories, they also played a significant role in the club's subsequent downfall.

The 1995 Clinton List – a blacklist of organisations suspected of peddling in the international drug trade – made the Cali cartel its No1 target. The team's assets were frozen, sponsorship deals dried up and the club plunged into debt.

As fans rioted following the meteoric demise of their team, America's name was still on the list. Like a cancer, America's pariah status had been eating away at the club for 16 years.

Former national coach Eduardo Lara has now been handed the reigns of restoring America's pride, but unless the club's crippling off-the-pitch problems can be resolved he will have an almost impossible job on his hands.

Tough going

America's replacements, Patriotas, will also find it tough going next season. Formed just nine years ago, they coped admirably with one of the smallest budgets in the second tier. A strong home support will help, but 2012 will be very much about survival.

Accompanying the Boyaca club into the top flight are Deportivo Pasto, who secured a return after an absence of two years. The team from the Andean mountains will replace Deportivo Pereira who finished bottom and were therefore relegated automatically.

Millonarios, the only club to match the 13 championship stars on America's badge, won their first silverware in 10 years after lifting the Colombian Cup. Ricardo Paez's men beat Boyaca Chico home and away in the Final after an exhausting 18-game campaign.

City rivals Santa Fe defeated Millonarios in the late-season Bogota derby with a last-minute header from goalkeeper Camilo Vargas, but their exploits in the Sudamericana Cup earlier in the campaign, where they made it to the quarter-finals, had a draining effect and they finished poorly.

Apertura winners Nacional will join Junior and Once Caldas in the 2012 Libertadores, and their coach, Santiago Escobar, has threatened a major reshuffle in a bid to prepare the team to challenge on both league and continental fronts.

Bogota's third team, Equidad, who endured a miserable clausura enter the Sudamericana Cup after reaching the apertura Final.

Independiente, Atletico Huila and Real Cartagena all had poor campaigns, while crisis club Cucuta were lucky to finish the season at all after financial woes continued to dog the 2007 Libertadores semi-finalists. They were twice rescued at the eleventh hour following threats of player strikes over unpaid wages.

New boys Itagui Diares did just enough to avoid becoming embroiled in serious relegation strife, but keeping hold of the league's second-top goalscorer Lionard Pajoy will be key as they seek to consolidate in their second season of top-flight football.

Carl Worswick

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PLAYER OF THE SEASON
CARLOS BACCA (Junior)
League top goalscorer for the second time, and leading striker in the Cup, he played a defining role in Junior's run to a seventh title.

COACH OF THE SEASON
RICARDO PAEZ (Millonarios)
The ex-Venezuela manager guided Millos to their first trophy in 10 years. They were a whisker away from the double after going out on penalties to Junior in the league knockout semi-finals.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
PEDRO FRANCO (Millonarios)
Captain of the Colombia youth side that won the Toulon tournament and impressed in this summer's Under-20 World Cup, he has cemented his place as a regular starter in Millonarios' defence.

Goals galore: Bacca

ECUADOR
Consistent Deportivo claim fifth crown

On the ball...skipper Saritama (no10) was the midfield creator and driving force behind Deportivo Quito's title triumph

Deportivo Quito won the Ecuadorian championship for the fifth time – and the third in the last four years – beating Emelec by a single goal in both legs of the Final, first in Guayaquil and then in front of their own fans.

Both games were scrappy affairs, and the championship probably deserved better, but they were won by the better side. Deportivo won the away leg with a goal from Fidel Martinez, while Emelec rarely threatened in the return and a late strike from substitute Matias Alustiza clinched victory.

Deportivo always looked the season's best tip. They were the form side, consistent throughout the year, and they found an extra gear after the appointment in May of Argentinian coach Carlos Ischia. He introduced the promising Martinez, whose pace – along with that of Juan Carlos Paredes – opened up the field for the passing of captain and playmaker Luis Fernando Saritama. And though the goals dried up towards the end for striker Maxi Bevacqua, he still finished the year as the tournament's second-top scorer.

Emelec made it to the Final after winning the first stage of the competition in the opening half of the year. Then they lost coach Omar Asad and entered a period of turbulence, with Uruguayan replacement Juan Ramon Carrasco ousted at the end of November and veteran centre-back Marcelo Fleitas stepping up to take over. They finished the second phase of the campaign in fifth place and carried their mediocre form into the Final.

The play-off for third place – and a spot in the qualifying round of the Libertadores Cup – was won by El Nacional, who beat local rivals LDU Quito 3-2 on aggregate.

Given LDU's recent success in international competitions, this may seem a surprise. Edgardo Bauza's side also had the best defensive record in the championship, but his team lacked the thrust down the flanks of the club's recent sides. They also suffered an injury crisis and a late loss of form from centre-forward Hernan Barcos, who had been enjoying a splendid campaign. Then there was the problem of competing on two fronts.

Preparing for the Final of the Sudamericana Cup, they fielded a reserve side for the first leg against El Nacional, lost 2-1 and were unable to make up the difference in the return. Mario Saralegui's El Nacional always looked full of goals, with the prompting of Marvin Pita setting up chances for the strength of Juan Luis Anangono and the subtlety of Edison Preciado.

A strong rally by Guayaquil giants Barcelona was almost enough to snatch a place in the third/fourth play-off, marking a year in which Ecuadorian football was dominated by the big teams from the two major cities.

Only twice has the title been won by teams outside the Quito/Guayaquil axis, the last time in 2004 by Deportivo Cuenca. They were the best provincial team in 2011, finishing a solid sixth and showcasing an interesting striker in burly 20-year-old Juan Jose Govea.

Imbabura and Espoli were relegated and will be replaced this year by Tecnico Universitario and Macara.

Tim Vickery

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PLAYER OF THE SEASON
MARVIN PITA (El Nacional)
The two-footed midfield passing of the El Nacional captain was a delight to watch.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
FIDEL MARTINEZ
(Deportivo Quito)
A lithe and skilful left-footed support striker, the 21-year-old made a big impression. A 2007 Pan-American Games champion whose career stalled after a move to Cruzeiro in Brazil.

COACH OF THE YEAR
LUIS ZUBELDIA (Barcelona)
The Argentinian made a huge impact, awaking the sleeping giant and carrying them very close to the Libertadores play-off.

Libertadores battle...Zubeldia

PERU
Aurich take title out of Lima

Champion...Juan Aurich's Luis Guadalupe

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
LUIS TEJADA
(Juan Aurich)
The burly Panamanian striker made little impression in the Final, when he was well marked by Cristian Ramos, but he carried the side through the campaign with his pace and physical presence, finishing as tournament top scorer.

COACH OF THE SEASON
DIEGO UMANA
(Juan Aurich)
The highly-strung Colombian whose career is now on a roll was a champion in his homeland last year with Junior, and in only his second stint abroad led Aurich to their unprecedented triumph.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
ANDY POLO
(Universitario)
The stocky, quick 17-year-old support striker made a big impression and is one of a promising group of youngsters who are likely to be sold to ease the club's financial crisis.

Valuable...Polo is likely to move on

Juan Aurich's success saw the title, known as the Descentralizado, leave the capital for only the fourth time: Union Huaral, who are based in the same state as Lima, winning it twice (in 1976 and 1989) and Melgar of Arequipa once (in 1981), before Aurich took it north to Chiclayo.

That outcome looked highly unlikely eight seconds after half-time in the first leg of the play-off Final when Alianza Lima took a two-goal lead through wide men Joazhino Arroe and Jorge Bazan on Aurich's synthetic pitch. Although veteran striker Ysrael Zuniga pulled a goal back, it wasn't enough to prevent Aurich's first home defeat in over a year and few gave them any chance in the return.

However, they took the initiative in Lima, with roving right-back Roberto Guizasola setting up another close-range Zuniga finish to level the aggregate scores and force a third game.

With four players sent off and others suspended for an accumulation of yellow cards, both teams were depleted for the deciding game which, as it was played in the capital's National Stadium, was as good as a home tie for Alianza.

But this time Aurich were happy to sit back and play on the break. Goalkeeper Diego Penny was their hero as the game ended goalless, and he then saved two penalties in the shoot-out as his side won 3-1.

Fall guy...Anderson Cueto is sent flying by Alianza's Edgar Villamarin in the Final

Security concerns

Security concerns meant that authorisation to go ahead with the third game only came some 90 minutes before the scheduled kick-off – which was an appropriate climax for a competition whose organisation left a lot to be desired.

Regulations encourage clubs to make complaints against their rivals in the hope of being awarded three points by tribunal. Inti Gas of Ayacucho were one of those who suffered, losing their place in the Sudamericana Cup a day after the season ended when they were overtaken in the table following a complaint in favour of Union Comercio.

The team who lost most points were Lima giants Universitario, whose financial woes are far worse than any of their rivals. Their players were not paid for six months and in protest they stopped signing the team sheets, thus automatically forfeiting the points.

Their crisis also had a comic side as they forget their shirts on an away trip and took to the pitch in training tops with the numbers drawn on with felt pen. On another occasion they travelled late to Cuzco to face Cienciano and had to start with only nine players, all of them reserves who had just played (and lost) against their opponents' second string.

There was also a tragic side when, in the big Lima derby, some home fans attacked Alianza supporters in the executive boxes, throwing one fan to his death. Universitario's ground was closed as a result.

Universitario lost so many points they almost fell into the second division. But they survived in the end, and Alianza Atletico and CNI of Iquitos were relegated. Jose Galvez of Chimbote came straight back to the top flight and Real Garcilaso of Cuzco, only founded in 2009, were promoted as Peru Cup winners after beating Pacifico 4-3 on aggregate in the Final.

Aurich and Alianza Lima both qualified for the Libertadores Cup, with Sport Huancayo going into the qualifying round for their first appearance in the competition – their joy tempered by the loss of striker Irven Avila to capital club Sporting Cristal.

So even in the year of Aurich, almost all roads still lead to Lima.

Tim Vickery

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URUGUAY
Veteran leads the way for Nacional

Wild with delight...Nacional supporters celebrate Alvaro Recoba's 78th-minute goal had clinched a last-day victory over Liverpool – and made sure of the apertura title

Former Internazionale midfielder Alvaro Recoba scored the only goal of the game as Nacional beat Liverpool 1-0 at the Centenario Stadium in Montevideo on the final day of the Uruguayan season to win the apertura.

"The way we won the apertura was cute," admitted Recoba, who had rejoined the club he left 14 years ago from Danubio earlier in the year. "But if we are a big team, as we have now demonstrated, we have to think ahead, in the knowledge we must try to win the championship."

The 35-year-old veteran had already edged Nacional towards the opening-championship crown two weeks earlier, appearing as a late substitute to score the winner from the penalty spot against arch-rivals Penarol.

"The most important thing was to beat Penarol and then see what could happen," he added.

Recoba's former side Danubio finished just a point behind Nacional with Penarol a further point adrift in third. One of the most poignant statistics of the season was the fact that 10 of the 16 top-flight sides had changed their coach between the start of the season in August and the end of December.

Veteran striker Marcelo Zalayeta of Penarol was top scorer in the apertura. The 33-year-old scored eight goals, one ahead of Liverpool's Emiliano Alfaro who capped a fine season by making his international debut for Uruguay against Italy in November.

Nacional president Ricardo Alarcon was reported to be in discussions over a move for Alfaro, but he may face competition for the 23-year-old from Italian side Catania. Benfica midfielder Pablo Aimar – who was a team-mate of Nacional coach Marcelo Gallardo at River Plate in Argentina before his move to Europe – is said to be another target for the new apertura champions.

Cristiano Coello

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PLAYER OF THE SEASON
ALVARO RECOBA (Nacional)
Despite his advancing years, the midfielder was a key influence in Nacional's success – his first national title in an illustrious career.

COACH OF THE SEASON
MARCELO GALLARDO (Nacional)
The former River Plate, Monaco and Argentina midfielder won the apertura in his first campaign as a coach, having hung up his boots in June.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
JOAO PEDRO (Penarol)
The 19-year-old Brazilian arrived on loan from Italian side Palermo in August and made an immediate impact, scoring six times in 13 games.

No1...Gallardo was a big success

SUDAMERICANA CUP
La U are deserved champions

Silver service...Universidad de Chile get in the party mood after their Sudamericana Cup Final victory over LDU Quito in Santiago

The 10th edition of South America's second-most important club competition was won by what was undeniably the best team, Universidad de Chile collecting their first continental title with a comprehensive 4-0 aggregate victory over LDU Quito in the Final.

A record of 10 wins, two draws and no defeats – with 21 goals scored and two conceded – speaks for itself, but *La U*'s triumphant march began with a 1-0 aggregate win over Fenix of Uruguay, whose compatriots Nacional were then beaten home and away in the next round.

The match that made everyone sit up and take notice, however, was an astonishing win in Brazil against Ronaldinho's Flamengo in the round of 16, when even the 4-0 first-leg scoreline failed to do justice to the Chilean side's total dominance.

It was a perfect display of the philosophy of Argentinian coach Jorge Sampaoli, who had already led the club to the first domestic championship of the year. A disciple of his compatriot and former Chile coach Marcelo Bielsa, Sampaoli sends out his side with two wingers and a central striker. The team defends with a high line and seeks to keep opponents under constant mental and physical pressure, winning the ball in their half and exchanging quick passes with impressive movement and dynamism.

Confronted with such precision at pace, Arsenal of Argentina were the next to be dispatched, before the trickiest moment of the campaign: the first leg of the semi-finals away to Brazil's Vasco da Gama, whose tails were up following an epic comeback to beat Universitario of Peru 5-4.

Until Sampaoli corrected an error of selection on the half hour his team were in trouble. But they came back from Rio having earned a 1-1 draw, before winning the home leg 2-0 to set up a Final against LDU of Ecuador.

Winners of this trophy in 2009, and Libertadores champions the previous year, LDU are once again coached by Argentina's Edgardo Bauza, the architect of those triumphs. The 2011 LDU may lack the thrust down the flanks of those previous sides, but they do have a better front man in Argentinian centre-forward Hernan Barcos. Then there is the advantage of the altitude in Quito, which is always difficult for unacclimatised opponents and was always likely to be problematic for a team as dynamic as *La U*.

For the first leg Sampaoli shrewdly played the pragmatic card, sacrificing one of his wingers for an extra defensive midfielder.

Barcos had an off night and the visitors snatched victory with a goal shortly before half-time, Eduardo Vargas rounding the keeper and sliding home after cutting across from the left to latch on to a defence-splitting pass from Marcelo Diaz.

Outstanding Vargas

The midfield excellence of Diaz was a feature of the campaign, and right-sided striker Vargas was the outstanding player in South American football in the second half of the year. He soon settled any nerves in the second leg in Santiago, rounding off a typically flowing move in the second minute with a left-footed finish.

LDU looked to the pace of Luis Bolanos to pull them back into the game, and they brought on big Walter Calderon for an aerial assault, but their remote chance of a comeback ended when central defender Jorge Guagua was sent off.

The Chilean side took advantage of the extra space, with Gustavo Lorenzetti applying the finishing touch to yet another piece of combination play, and then Vargas danced through for a wonderful solo goal - his 11th of the campaign, setting a tournament record. The 22-year-old striker later signed a deal to join Italian side Napoli.

Tim Vickery

No way through...Ronaldinho is stopped by Osvaldo Gonzalez as Flamengo fall to *La U*

ESM TEAM OF THE MONTH DECEMBER 2011

European Sports Media

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

ESM – EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

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SEASON RANKING

Cummulative votes through the season (total votes cast in September, October, November and December 2011)

GOALKEEPERS

Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)	15 votes
Iker Casillas (Real Madrid)	6
Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus)	4
Joe Hart (Manchester City)	3
Tim Krul (Newcastle)	2
Victor Valdes (Barcelona)	2
Pepe Reina (Liverpool)	1
Salvatore Sirigu (PSG)	1
Marc-Andre Ter Stegen (Bor M'gladbach)	1
Wojciech Szczesny (Arsenal)	1
Javi Varas (Sevilla)	1
Tolga Zengin (Trabzonspor)	1
Ron-Robert Zieler (Hannover)	1

DEFENDERS

Vincent Kompany (Manchester City)	15
Dani Alves (Barcelona)	14
Daniel Van Buyten (Bayern Munich)	9
Holger Badstuber (Bayern Munich)	7
Marcelo (Real Madrid)	9
Patrice Evra (Manchester United)	6
Thiago Silva (Milan)	5
Philipp Lahm (Bayern Munich)	4
Stefan Lichtsteiner (Juventus)	4
Carles Puyol (Barcelona)	4
Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus)	3
Gerard Pique (Barcelona)	3
Nemanja Vidic (Manchester United)	4
Phil Jones (Manchester United)	3
John Terry (Chelsea)	3
Andre Santos (Arsenal)	2
Mats Hummels (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Ledley King (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Rafinha (Bayern Munich)	2
Micah Richards (Manchester City)	2
Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid)	2
Thomas Vermaelen (Arsenal)	2
Eric Abidal (Barcelona)	1
Alvaro Arbeloa (Real Madrid)	1
Henri Bedimo (Montpellier)	1
Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus)	1
Jose Bosingwa (Chelsea)	1
Ricardo Carvalho (Real Madrid)	1
Dante (Bor M'gladbach)	1
Rio Ferdinand (Manchester United)	1
Paulo Jorge (APOEL)	1
Aleksandar Kolarov (Manchester City)	1
Laurent Koscielny (Arsenal)	1
Lucio (Internazionale)	1
Diego Lugano (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Michel Bastos (Lyon)	1
Pepe (Real Madrid)	1
Lukasz Pisczek (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Adil Rami (Valencia)	1
Marcel Schmelzer (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Martin Skrtel (Liverpool)	1
Chris Smalling (Manchester United)	1
Nicolas Spolli (Catania)	1
Kyle Walker (Tottenham Hotspur)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Xavi (Barcelona)	18
David Silva (Manchester City)	9
Franck Ribery (Bayern Munich)	8
Cesc Fabregas (Barcelona)	7
Andrea Pirlo (Juventus)	6
Andres Iniesta (Barcelona)	5
Nani (Manchester Utd)	5
Marco Reus (Bor M'gladbach)	5
Gareth Bale (Tottenham Hotspur)	4
Bastian Schweinsteiger (Bayern Munich)	4
Mario Gotze (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Javier Pastore (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Kevin-Prince Boateng (Milan)	3
Toni Kroos (Bayern Munich)	3
Mesut Ozil (Real Madrid)	3
Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid)	2
Claudio Marchisio (Juventus)	2
Alex Song (Arsenal)	2
Yaya Toure (Manchester City)	2
Xabi Alonso (Real Madrid)	2
Charlie Adam (Liverpool)	1
Pablo Aimar (Benfica)	1
Sergio Buquets (Barcelona)	1
Kaka (Real Madrid)	1
Frank Lampard (Chelsea)	1
Ezequiel Lavezzi (Napoli)	1
Dries Mertens (PSV Eindhoven)	1
Jon Obi Mikel (Chelsea)	1
Samir Nasri (Manchester City)	1
Scott Parker (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Simon Pepe (Juventus)	1
Rafael Van der Vaart (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Theo Walcott (Arsenal)	1
Granit Xhaka (Basle)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel Messi (Barcelona)	30
Robin Van Persie (Arsenal)	21
Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)	18
Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich)	12
Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)	5
Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)	4
Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)	3
Roberto Soldado (Valencia)	3
Mario Balotelli (Manchester City)	2
Edinson Cavani (Napoli)	2
Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)	2
Juan Mata (Chelsea)	2
Alexis Sanchez (Barcelona)	2
Demba Ba (Newcastle United)	1
Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)	1
Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)	1
Falcao (Atletico Madrid)	1
Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (Schalke)	1
Miroslav Klose (Lazio)	1
Robert Lewandowski (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich)	1
Raul (Schalke)	1

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New look! New features! New writers!

PLUS twice-weekly columns from Brian Glanville and Keir Radnedge

ANDORRA

Could still do better

Lusitans ended last year unbeaten in the Andorran top flight – scoring five or more goals in four of their 10 matches – but they still trail in second place to FC Santa Coloma.

AZERBAIJAN

Club and country

Azerbaijan Premier League side Baki have agreed to allow coach Aleksandrs Starkovs to continue in his dual role and extend his second spell in charge of Latvia's national team by a further two years.

The 56-year-old, who led his home nation to the finals of the European Championship in 2004, joined Baki in January 2011. His side were fourth in the table, eight points behind the league leaders Neftci after 18 games.

BULGARIA

Defender caught out

CSKA Sofia's Kostadin Stoyanov faces a ban of up to two years after failing a drugs test after the 1-0 win against Levski. The defender tested positive for the stimulant Methylhexanamine.

In trouble...Stoyanov (right)

4 the record-breaking number of Club World Cups that Auckland City's 30-year-old striker Daniel Koprivic has now appeared in

Club Results

WORLD

CLUB WORLD CUP

In Japan

● *The champions of Europe (Barcelona) and South America (Santos) qualified automatically for the semi-finals*

Preliminary round

Dec 8 - Toyota
Kashiwa Reysol (Jap) 2 (Tanaka 37, Kudo 40)
Auckland City (NZ) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 18,754. **Ref:** Rizzoli (Ita)
Kashiwa: Sugeno - Masushima, Kondo, Hashimoto, Sakai (Mizuno 67), Jorge Wagner, Otani, Barada (Kurisawa 82), Leandro Domingues, Kudo, Tanaka (Kitajima 85).
Auckland: Spoonley - Vicelich, Mulligan, Hogg, Pritchett, Angel Berlanga, Feneridis (Corrales 49), Andreu, Exposito, Albert Vidal (Koprivcic 69), Dickinson (Tade 68).

Quarter-finals

Dec 11 - Toyota
Esperance (Tun) 1 (Darragi 60)
Al Sadd (Qat) 2 (Ibrahim 33, Obaid 49)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 21,251. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)
Esperance: Ben Cherifia - Hicheri, Coulibaly (Afful 46), Chemmam, Yaya, Mouelhi, Traoui, Bouazzi, Darragi (Ayari 75), Msakni, Ndjeng.
Al Sadd: Saqr - Belhadj, Majid, Obaid, Lee Jung-soo, Kasola, Keita, Al Bloushi, Rizik (Zakariya 72), Ibrahim (Ahmad 75), Niang (Khalid 90+2).

Dec 11 - Toyota
Kashiwa Reysol 1 (Leandro Domingues 53)
Monterrey (Mex) 1 (Suazo 58)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 1-1. **Att:** 27,525.
Ref: O'Leary (NZ)
Kashiwa 4-3 on pens
Kashiwa: Sugeno - Masushima, Kondo, Hashimoto, Sakai, Jorge Wagner, Kurisawa, Otani, Leandro Domingues, Kudo (Hayashi 106), Tanaka.
Monterrey: Orozco - Basanta, Chavez (Ayovi 90+1), Mier, Osorio, L Perez, Cardozo (S Perez 100), Zavala, Suazo, Santana (De Nigris 97), Delgado.

5th-place play-off

Dec 14 - Toyota
Monterrey 3 (Mier 39, De Nigris 44, Zavala 47)
Esperance 2 (Ndjeng 31, Mouelhi pen 76)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 13,639. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
Monterrey: Orozco - Basanta, S Perez, Chavez, Mier, L Perez (Morales 29), Cardozo, Zavala, Ayovi, Santana (Meza 87), De Nigris.
Esperance: Ben Cherifia - Afful, Hicheri, Coulibaly, Chemmam (Ayari 54), Yaya, Mouelhi, Traoui, Bouazzi (Darragi 77), Msakni, Ndjeng.

Semi-finals

Dec 14 - Toyota
Kashiwa Reysol 1 (Sakai 54)
Santos (Bra) 3 (Neymar 19, Borges 24, Danilo 63)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 29,173. **Ref:** Rizzoli (Ita)
Kashiwa: Sugeno - Masushima, Kondo, Hashimoto (Hyodo 80), Sakai, Jorge Wagner, Kurisawa, Otani, Leandro Domingues, Kudo (Kitajima 46), Tanaka (Sawa 65).
Santos: Rafael - Edu Dracena, Durval, Bruno Rodrigo, Danilo (Bruno Aguiar 90+1), Elano (Alan Kardec 59), Henrique, Arouca, Ganso, Borges (Ibson 80), Neymar.

Dec 15 - Yokohama
Al Sadd 0
Barcelona (Spa) 4 (Adriano 25, 43, Keita 64, Maxwell 81)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 66,298. **Ref:** Aguilar (ESv)
Al Sadd: Saqr - Belhadj, Majid, Obaid, Lee Jung-soo, Kasola, Keita (Khalid 85), Al Bloushi (Abdulraab 65), Rizik, Ibrahim, Niang (Ahmad 77).
Barcelona: Valdes - Puyol, Mascherano, Abidal (Maxwell 66), Adriano, Thiago, Iniesta, Keita, Pedro, Messi, Villa (Sanchez 39; Cuenca 71).

3rd-place play-off

Dec 18 - Yokohama
Kashiwa Reysol 0
Al Sadd 0
Att: 60,527. **Ref:** Doue (IvC)
Al Sadd 5-3 on pens
Kashiwa: Sugeno - Masushima, Kondo, Hashimoto, Sakai, Jorge Wagner, Otani, Mizuno, Barada, Kitajima (Hayashi 81), Tanaka (Sawa 75).
Al Sadd: Saqr - Belhadj, Majid, Obaid, Lee Jung-soo, Al Hamad (Zakariya 90+3), Keita, Rizik, Abdulraab (Khalid 83), Ibrahim (Afif 73), Niang.

Final

Dec 18 - Yokohama
Santos 0
Barcelona 4 (Messi 17, 82, Xavi 24, Fabregas 45)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 68,166. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
Santos: Rafael - Edu Dracena, Durval, Leo, Bruno Rodrigo, Danilo (Elano 31), Henrique, Arouca, Ganso (Ibson 83), Borges (Alan Kardec 79), Neymar.
Barcelona: Valdes - Daniel Alves, Pique (Mascherano 56), Puyol (Fontas 85), Abidal, Xavi, Busquets, Iniesta, Fabregas, Messi, Thiago (Pedro 79).

Previous winners

2000	Corinthians (Bra)
2001-04	*not held*
2005	Sao Paulo (Bra)
2006	Internacional (Bra)
2007	Milan (Ita)
2008	Manchester United (Eng)
2009	Barcelona (Spa)
2010	Internazionale (Ita)

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Dec 7
Manchester City (Eng) 2 (Silva 37, Y Toure 52)
Bayern Munich (Ger) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 46,002. **Ref:** Lannoy (Fra)
Man City: Hart - Savic, Kompany, Lescott, Clichy, Y Toure (Balotelli 81), Barry, Nasri, Silva (Johnson 84), Dzeko (De Jong 77), Aguero.
Bayern: Butt - Rafinha, Boateng, Badstuber, Contento, Tymoshchuk, Luiz Gustavo, Alaba, Pranjic, Olic, Petersen (Usami 81).

Dec 7
Villarreal (Spa) 0
Napoli (Ita) 2 (Inler 65, Hamsik 76)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,350. **Ref:** Moen (Nor)
Villarreal: Diego Lopez - Angel, Zapata (Rodriguez 76), Musacchio, Joan Oriol, Senna (Joselu 73), Bruno, De Guzman, Perez, Nilmar (Camunas 64), Marco Ruben.
Napoli: De Sanctis - Campagnaro, Cannavaro, Aronica, Maggio, Gargano, Zuniga (Grava 90+2), Inler, Hamsik (Dzemaili 79), Cavani (Pandev 82), Lavezzi.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern (Q)	6	4	1	1	11	6	13
Napoli (Q)	6	3	2	1	10	6	11
Man City	6	3	1	2	9	6	10
Villarreal	6	0	0	6	2	14	0

Group B

Dec 7
Internazionale (Ita) 1 (Cambiasso 51)
CSKA Moscow (Rus) 2 (Doumbia 50, V Berezutsky 86)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 23,295. **Ref:** Fernandez Borbalan (Spa)
Inter: Castellazzi - Nagatomo, Ranocchia, Samuel, Chivu (Zarate 46), Faraoni, Zanetti, Cambiasso, Obi (Alvarez 70), Coutinho (Caldirola 46), Milito.
CSKA: Gabulov - Semberas (Aldonin 77), Ignashevich, A Berezutsky, Nababkin, V Berezutsky, Dzagoev, Mamaev, Oliseh (Cauna 77), Vagner Love, Doumbia (Schennikov 90+2).

Dec 7
Lille (Fra) 0
Trabzonspor (Tur) 0
Att: 16,375. **Ref:** Proenca (Por)
Lille: Landreau - Debuchy, Basa, Chedjou, Beria (Bonnart 84), Balmont, Mavuba, Payet (Rodelin 89), Cole (Obraniak 69), Hazard, Sow.
Trabzonspor: Tolga - Celustka (Mierzejewski 33), Giray, Glowacki, Cech, Serkan, Zokora, Colman, Altintop, Alanzinho (Paulo Henrique 65), Burak (Mustafa 90+1).

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter (Q)	6	3	1	2	8	7	10
CSKA (Q)	6	2	2	2	9	8	8
Trabzonspor	6	1	4	1	3	5	7
Lille	6	1	3	2	6	6	6

Group C

Dec 7
Basle (Swi) 2 (Streller 9, A Frei 84)
Manchester United (Eng) 1 (Jones 89)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 36,000. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)
Basle: Sommer - Steinhofer, Abraham, Dragovic, Park, Shaqiri (Stocker 90+2), Cabral, G Xhaka (Chipperfield 83), F Frei, A Frei (Kusunga 88), Streller.
Man United: De Gea - Smalling, Vidic (Evans 44), Ferdinand, Evra, Park (Macheda 82), Giggs, Jones, Young (Welbeck 64), Nani, Rooney.

Dec 7
Benfica (Por) 1 (Cardozo 7)
Otelul Galati (Rom) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 35,155. **Ref:** Grafe (Ger)
Benfica: Artur - Ruben Amorim, Jardel, Garay, Emerson, Gaitan, Witsel, Javi Garcia, Bruno Cesar (Nolito 56), Almar (Rodrigo 70), Cardozo (Saviola 78).
Otelul: Grahovac - Rapa, Perendija, Benga, Ilie (Ljubinkovic 21), Filip, Neagu (Pena 70), Giurgiu, Antal (Frunza 81), Paraschiv, Iorga.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benfica (Q)	6	3	3	0	8	4	12
Basle (Q)	6	3	2	1	11	10	11
Man United	6	2	3	1	11	8	9
Otelul	6	0	0	6	3	11	0

Group D

Dec 7
Ajax (Hol) 0
Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Callejon 14, 90+3, Higuain 41)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 51,557. **Ref:** Moreira de Sousa (Por)
Ajax: Vermeer - Van der Wiel, Vertonghen, Blind, Anita, Eriksen, Enoh, Janssen (Klaassen 76), Sulejmani, Lodeiro (Bulykin 74), Ebecilio.
Real Madrid: Adan - Arbeloa (Pedro Mendes 67), Varane, Raul Albiol, Fabio Coentrao, Granero (Xabi Alonso 59), Sahin, Callejon, Kaka, Benzema (Altintop 54), Higuain.

Dec 7
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 1 (Kovacic 40)
Lyon (Fra) 7 (Gomis 45, 48, 52, 70, Gonalons 47, Lopez 64, Briand 75)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 16,457. **Ref:** Clattenburg (Eng)
Dinamo: Kelava - Vrsaljko, Vida, Ademi, Ibanez, Leko, Badelj, Calello, Sammir (Alispahic 66), Kovacic (Pokrivac 80), Beqiraj (Situm 55).
Sent off: Leko 28min.
Lyon: Lloris - Dabo, Kone, Lovren (Lopez 54), Cissokho, Briand, Gonalons, Gourcuff, Lacazette (Ederson 65), Fofana, Gomis.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid (Q)	6	6	0	0	19	2	18
Lyon (Q)	6	2	2	2	9	7	8
Ajax	6	2	2	2	6	6	8
Dinamo Zagreb	6	0	0	6	3	22	0

Group E

Dec 6
Chelsea (Eng) 3 (Drogba 3, 76, Ramires 22)
Valencia (Spa) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 41,109. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)
Chelsea: Cech - Ivanovic, Terry, David Luiz, Cole, Oriol Romeu, Raul Meireles, Ramires (Mikel 65), Sturridge, Drogba (Fernando Torres 78), Mata (Malouda 83).
Valencia: Diego Alves - Barragan, Rami, Victor Ruiz, Jordi Alba (Aduriz 55), Feghouli (Pablo 65), Tino Costa (Parejo 76), Albelda, Mathieu, Jonas, Soldado.

CYPRUS

More APOEL success

Champions League history makers APOEL inflicted a first league defeat of the season on Omonia, winning 3-1 away to the league leaders and taking their Nicosia rivals' place at the top of the table.

Having become the first side from Cyprus to make it through the group stage of Europe's premier club tournament, APOEL will now face Lyon in the round of 16.

No Cypriot team has ever beaten a French club side, but APOEL goalkeeper Dionisios Chiotis says: "We have not put a cap on how far we can go. We are an unpredictable side so we can only hope that things continue to go well for us."

Derby clash...Omonia's Noel Kaseke (left) and Ivan Trickovski of APOEL

CZECH REPUBLIC

Positive result

Viktoria Plzen defender Davida Bystrone tested positive for an unspecified banned substance after his side's 1-0 victory over BATE Borisov of Belarus in the Champions League.

The result helped Plzen finish third in their group and qualify for the knockout stage of the Europa League.

Dec 6
Genk (Blg) 1 (Vossen 30)
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 1 (Derdiyok 79)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 21,187. **Ref:** Tagliavento (Ita)
Genk: Koteles - Vanden Borre, Nadson, Simaeys, Pudil, Ngcongca, Camus, Tozser, Ndabashinze, Limbombe (Buffel 75), Vossen (Barda 81).
Leverkusen: Leno - Castro, Schwaab, Reinartz (Jorgensen 87), Kadlec (Oczipka 73), Bender, Rolfes, Schurrle (Kiessling 68), Ballack, Sam, Derdiyok.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP E – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chelsea (Q)	6	3	2	1	13	4	11
Leverkusen (Q)	6	3	1	2	8	8	10
Valencia	6	2	2	2	12	7	8
Genk	6	0	3	3	2	16	3

Group F

Dec 6
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 2 (Blaszczykowski 23, Hummels pen 32)
Marseille (Fra) 3 (Remy 45+4, A Ayew 85, Valbuena 87)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 65,590. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Dortmund: Weidenfeller - Piszczek, Felipe Santana, Hummels, Lowe, Gundogan, Kehl (Da Silva 32), Blaszczykowski, Lewandowski, Gotze (Perisic 46), Barrios (Kagawa 63).
Marseille: Mandanda - Azpilicueta, Diawara, Nkoulou, Traore, Mbia (Cheyrou 46), Diarra, Amalfitano, Gonzalez (J Ayew 67), A Ayew, Remy (Valbuena 73).

Dec 6
Olympiakos (Gre) 3 (Djebbour 16, David Fuster 36, Modesto 89)
Arsenal (Eng) 1 (Benayoun 57)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 30,816. **Ref:** Undiano Mallenco (Spa)
Olympiakos: Megyeri - Torosidis, Mellberg, Papadopoulos, Marcano, Mirallas, Modesto, Maniatis, Holebas (Orbaiz 37), David Fuster (Abdoun 64), Djebbour (Papazoglou 90+1).
Arsenal: Fabianski (Mannone 25) - Djourou, Vermaelen, Squillaci, Andre Santos (Miquel 51), Frimpong, Coquelin (Rosicky 67), Benayoun, Oxlade-Chamberlain, Chamakh, Arshavin.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP F – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal (Q)	6	3	2	1	7	6	11
Marseille (Q)	6	3	1	2	7	4	10
Olympiakos	6	3	0	3	8	6	9
Dortmund	6	1	1	4	6	12	4

Group G

Dec 6
APOEL Nicosia (Cyp) 0
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 2 (Luiz Adriano 62, Selezniov 78)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 22,537. **Ref:** Hategan (Rom)
APOEL: Pardo - Poursaitidis, Paulo Jorge, Marcelo Oliveira, Alexandrou, Nuno Morais, Jahic, Charalambides (Adorno 77), Marcinho (Belaid 60), Manduca (Solari 68), Trickovski.
Shakhtar: Rybka - Srna, Kucher, Rakitskyi, Shevchuk, Fernandinho, Hubschman, Douglas Costa (Eduardo 78), Willian (Moreno 84), Mkhitaryan, Luiz Adriano (Selezniov 73).

Dec 6
Porto (Por) 0
Zenit St Petersburg (Rus) 0
Att: 46,512. **Ref:** Velasco Carballo (Spa)
Porto: Helton - Maicon, Rolando, Otamendi (Belluschi 82), Pereira, Defour (Kleber 46), Fernando, Joao Moutinho, Djalma (Silvestre Varela 68), Hulk, Rodriguez.
Zenit: Malafeev - Anyukov, Hubocan, Lombaerts, Criscito, Denisov, Semak, Fayzulin (Bystrov 58), Shirokov (Zyryanov 46), Danny, Lazovic (Bruno Alves 82).

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP G – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
APOEL (Q)	6	2	3	1	6	6	9
Zenit (Q)	6	2	3	1	7	5	9
Porto	6	2	2	2	7	7	8
Shakhtar	6	1	2	3	6	8	5

Group H

Dec 6
Barcelona (Spa) 4 (Sergi Roberto 35, Montoya 60, Pedro 63, pen 89)
BATE Borisov (Bls) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 37,374. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)
Barcelona: Pinto - Montoya, Bartra, Fontas, Maxwell, Dos Santos (Muniesa 58), Thiago, Sergi Roberto (Riverola 79), Cuenca, Pedro, Rafinha (Deulofeu 70).
BATE: Gutor - Yurevich, Filipenko, Simic, Bordachev, Baga, A Volodko, Pavlov (Gordeychuk 64), Likhtarovich (Olekhnovich 67), Kontsevoy, Bressan (Kezman 77).

Dec 6
Viktoria Plzen (Cze) 2 (Bystron 89, Duris 90+3)
Milan (Ita) 2 (Alexandre Pato 47, Robinho 48)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 19,854. **Ref:** Vad (Hun)
Plzen: Cech - Rajtoral, Bystron, Cisovsky, Limbersky, Horvath, Jiracek (Darida 28), Petrzela, Kolar (Duris 67), Pilar (Hora 84), Bakos.
Milan: Amelia - De Sciglio, Mexes, Bonera, Taiwo (Zambrotta 90), Ambrosini, Emanuelson, Seedorf, Nocerino (Thiago Silva 40), Alexandre Pato, Robinho (Cristante 81).

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP H – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona (Q)	6	5	1	0	20	4	16
Milan (Q)	6	2	3	1	11	8	9
Plzen	6	1	2	3	4	11	5
BATE	6	0	2	4	2	14	2

Top 2 in each group qualified for 1st knockout round; 3rd-placed teams entered Europa League at 1st knockout round stage

1st knockout round draw

Basle v Bayern Munich (Feb 22 & Mar 13)
Bayer Leverkusen v Barcelona (Feb 14 & Mar 7)
CSKA Moscow v Real Madrid (Feb 21 & Mar 14)
Lyon v APOEL Nicosia (Feb 14 & Mar 7)
Marseille v Internazionale (Feb 22 & Mar 13)
Milan v Arsenal (Feb 15 & Mar 6)
Napoli v Chelsea (Feb 21 & Mar 14)
Zenit St Petersburg v Benfica (Feb 15 & Mar 6)

EUROPA LEAGUE

Group A

Dec 15: PAOK Salonika (Gre) 1 Rubin Kazan (Rus) 1; Shamrock Rovers (Rlr) 0 Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) 4.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PAOK (Q)	6	3	3	0	10	6	12
Rubin (Q)	6	3	2	1	11	5	11
Tottenham	6	3	1	2	9	4	10
Shamrock	6	0	0	6	4	19	0

Group B

Dec 15: Copenhagen (Den) 0 Standard Liege (Blg) 1; Hanover (Ger) 3 Vorskla Poltava (Ukr) 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Standard (Q)	6	4	2	0	9	1	14
Hanover (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	7	11
Copenhagen	6	1	2	3	5	9	5
Vorskla	6	0	2	4	4	10	2

Group C

Dec 15: Hapoel Tel Aviv (Isr) 2 Legia Warsaw (Pol) 0; PSV Eindhoven (Hol) 2 Rapid Bucharest (Rom) 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSV (Q)	6	5	1	0	13	5	16
Legia (Q)	6	3	0	3	7	9	9
H Tel Aviv	6	2	1	3	10	9	7
Rapid Buch'st	6	1	0	5	5	12	3

Group D

Dec 14: Lazio (Ita) 2 Sporting Lisbon (Por) 0; Zurich (Swi) 2 Vaslui (Rom) 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sporting (Q)	6	4	0	2	8	4	12
Lazio (Q)	6	2	3	1	7	5	9
Vaslui	6	1	3	2	5	8	6
Zurich	6	1	2	3	5	8	5

Group E

Dec 14: Besiktas (Tur) 3 Stoke City (Eng) 1; Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) 3 Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) 3.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP E – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Besiktas (Q)	6	4	0	2	13	7	12
Stoke (Q)	6	3	2	1	10	7	11
Dynamo Kiev	6	1	4	1	7	7	7
M Tel Aviv	6	0	2	4	8	17	2

Group F

Dec 14: Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 4 Athletic Bilbao (Spa) 2; Slovan Bratislava (Slk) 2 Salzburg (Aut) 3.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP F – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Athletic (Q)	6	4	1	1	11	8	13
Salzburg (Q)	6	3	1	2	11	8	10
PSG	6	3	1	2	8	7	10
Slovan B'slava	6	0	1	5	4	11	1

Group G

Dec 15: Austria Vienna (Aut) 2 Malmo (Swe) 0; AZ Alkmaar (Hol) 1 Metalist Kharkiv (Ukr) 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP G – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Metalist (Q)	6	4	2	0	15	6	14
AZ (Q)	6	1	5	0	10	7	8
Austria	6	2	2	2	10	11	8
Malmo	6	0	1	5	4	15	1

Group H

Dec 15: Birmingham City (Eng) 1 Maribor (Sln) 0; Club Brugge (Blg) 1 Braga (Por) 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP H – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
C Brugge (Q)	6	3	2	1	12	9	11
Braga (Q)	6	3	2	1	12	6	11
Birmingham	6	3	1	2	8	8	10
Maribor	6	0	1	5	6	15	1

Group I

Dec 15: Atletico Madrid (Spa) 3 Rennes (Fra) 1; Udinese (Ita) 1 Celtic (Sco) 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP I – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atletico (Q)	6	4	1	1	11	4	13
Udinese (Q)	6	2	3	1	6	7	9
Celtic	6	1	3	2	6	7	6
Rennes	6	0	3	3	5	10	3

Group J

Dec 14: Maccabi Haifa (Isr) 0 Schalke (Ger) 3; Steaua Bucharest (Rom) 3 AEK Larnaca (Cyp) 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP J – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Schalke (Q)	6	4	2	0	13	2	14
Steaua (Q)	6	2	2	2	9	11	8
M Haifa	6	2	0	4	10	12	6
AEK Larnaca	6	1	2	3	4	11	5

Group K

Dec 14: Fulham (Eng) 2 OB Odense (Den) 2; Wisla Krakow (Pol) 2 Twente Enschede (Hol) 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP K – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Twente (Q)	6	4	1	1	14	7	13
Wisla (Q)	6	3	0	3	8	13	9
Fulham	6	2	2	2	9	6	8
OB	6	1	1	4	9	14	4

Group L

Dec 14: Anderlecht (Blg) 5 Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) 3; Sturm Graz (Aut) 1 AEK Athens (Gre) 3.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP L – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht (Q)	6	6	0	0	18	5	18
Lokomotiv (Q)	6	4	0	2	14	11	12
AEK Athens	6	1	0	5	8	15	3
Sturm	6	1	0	5	5	14	3

Top 2 in each group qualified for 1st knockout rnd

1st knockout round draw

● *The 8 3rd-placed teams from the Champions League group stage (marked ^) entered here*
Ajax^ v Manchester United^
AZ Alkmaar v Anderlecht
Braga v Besiktas*
Hanover v Club Brugge
Lazio v Atletico Madrid
Legia Warsaw v Sporting Lisbon
Lokomotiv Moscow v Athletic Bilbao
Porto^ v Manchester City^**
Rubin Kazan v Olympiakos^
Salzburg v Metalist Kharkiv
Steaua Bucharest v Twente Enschede
Stoke City v Valencia^
Trabzonspor^ v PSV Eindhoven
Udinese v PAOK Salonika
Viktoria Plzen^ v Schalke
Wisla Krakow v Standard Liege

*1st legs - Feb 16 (*Feb 14); 2nd legs - Feb 23 (**Feb 22)*

20 seasons since Manchester City were the top club in England at new year; they finished 10th and were relegated the next season

FRANCE

PSG's Christmas cheer

Paris Saint-Germain beat Saint-Etienne 1-0 with an own goal from Stephane Ruffier to go into the Christmas break three points clear at the top of Ligue 1. Montpellier, who would have been top on goal difference had they won, lost 4-2 at Evian.

Russian billionaire Dmitry Rybolovlev has become the majority shareholder of Monaco, the 2004 Champions League finalists who are currently bottom of Ligue 2.

HOLLAND

Team-mates back keeper in fan attack

Top of the table AZ's Dutch Cup game against Ajax was abandoned after 38 minutes when their players walked off in protest after goalkeeper Esteban Alvardo was sent off for a kicking a supporter who ran onto the pitch and confronted him with Ajax leading 1-0.

Alvardo's red card was later rescinded and the Dutch FA ordered the game to be replayed in full on January 19.

Hitting the fan...Alvardo

AUSTRIA

Dec 10: Rapid 0 Wacker 0; Mattersburg 2 Kapfenberger 0; Sturm 5 Austria 1; Ried 2 Wiener Neustadt 0.
Dec 11: Salzburg 2 Admira 1.
Dec 17: Ried 1 Sturm 1; Rapid 2 Admira 1; Kapfenberger 0 Wacker 1; Mattersburg 0 Wiener 1.
Dec 18: Salzburg 3 Austria 0.

AUSTRIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rapid	19	8	8	3	30	19	32
Ried	19	8	8	3	29	18	32
Salzburg	19	8	6	5	32	20	30
Austria	19	7	7	5	34	30	28
Admira	19	7	7	5	30	28	28
Sturm	19	7	6	6	33	28	27
Wacker	19	5	9	5	20	24	24
W Neustadt	19	5	7	7	17	27	22
Mattersburg	19	3	8	8	22	26	17
Kapfenberger	19	2	4	13	13	40	10

League now on winter break until Feb 10
36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated

BELGIUM

Regular season
Dec 9: Mechelen 2 Anderlecht 1.
Dec 10: Lokeren 1 Standard 1; Mons 0 Cercle Brugge 2; OH Leuven 2 Zulte Waregem 2; Gent 0 Beerschot 1; Genk 4 Lierse 0; Kortrijk 1 Westerlo 0.
Dec 11: Club Brugge 1 St Truiden 0.
Dec 17: Lierse 2 Kortrijk 0; St Truiden 0 Mechelen 0; Westerlo 3 Beerschot 1; Zulte Waregem 2 Mons 3.
Dec 18: Standard 0 Genk 0; Anderlecht 3 Lokeren 2; OH Leuven 3 Club Brugge 1; Cercle Brugge 0 Gent 1.
Dec 26: Club Brugge 1 Zulte Waregem 0; Kortrijk 2 Standard 0; Genk 4 Cercle Brugge 2; Gent 3 Westerlo 1; Beerschot 0 Lierse 0; Lokeren 0 St Truiden 0; Mechelen 2 OH Leuven 2.
Dec 27: Mons 1 Anderlecht 1.

BELGIUM – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	19	12	4	3	37	18	40
Gent	19	12	3	4	42	20	39
Club Brugge	19	11	4	4	32	21	37
Kortrijk	19	10	3	6	26	21	33
Standard	19	8	7	4	23	23	31
Genk	19	8	6	5	36	26	30
Cercle Brugge	19	8	6	5	24	20	30
Mons	19	7	6	6	35	32	27
Beerschot	19	6	7	6	29	26	25
Mechelen	19	5	6	8	24	35	21
Lokeren	19	4	8	7	25	28	20
OH Leuven	19	5	5	9	24	34	20
Lierse	19	3	8	8	14	25	17
Z Waregem	19	2	9	8	19	28	15
Westerlo	19	3	4	12	17	34	13
St Truiden	19	2	6	11	24	40	12

30-round regular season (15x2); top 6 enter championship play-offs, teams placed 7th to 14th enter Europa League place play-offs, bottom 2 (15th & 16th) enter relegation play-off (1 of them will go down)

CYPRUS

Regular season
Dec 10: Anagennisi 0 AEK 3; Anorthosis 2 Apollon 0; AEL 0 Ethnikos 0.
Dec 11: Omonia 1 APOEL 3; Aris 2 Nea Salamina 3; Ermis 1 Olympiakos 3.
Dec 12: Alki 1 ENP 0.
Dec 16: Anagennisi 0 Olympiakos 1; Anorthosis 2 Ethnikos 0; AEL 2 Nea Salamina 0.
Dec 19: Ermis 0 Apollon 2; Aris 1 ENP 0; APOEL 3 AEK 0; Alki 0 Omonia 3.

CYPRUS – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
APOEL	14	10	2	2	25	5	32
Omonia	14	9	4	1	24	9	31
AEL	14	9	4	1	16	3	31
Anorthosis	14	8	4	2	17	7	28
AEK	14	6	5	3	16	11	23
Apollon	14	6	1	7	16	20	19
Nea Salamina	14	5	4	5	16	19	19
Alki	14	5	1	8	16	25	16
Olympiakos	14	4	4	6	15	20	16
ENP	14	4	3	7	9	11	15
Aris	14	3	5	6	13	17	14
Ethnikos	14	3	4	7	8	13	13
Anagennisi	14	1	4	9	10	24	7
Ermis	14	1	3	10	5	22	6

26-round regular season (13x2): top 4 will form championship group, 5th to 8th will form "placement" group, 9th to 12th will form relegation group (from which the bottom team will go down), 13th & 14th will be relegated automatically

CZECH REPUBLIC

CZECH REPUBLIC	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sparta	16	13	1	2	33	12	40
Liberec	16	10	4	2	38	19	34
Plzen	16	9	3	4	38	22	30
M Boleslav	16	8	4	4	27	17	28
Jablonec	16	8	3	5	38	18	27
Pribram	16	9	0	7	28	28	27
Teplice	16	7	3	6	18	19	24
Slovacko	16	7	2	7	16	18	23
Dukla	16	5	5	6	20	20	20
Slavia	16	5	5	6	15	20	20
H Kralove	16	5	4	7	13	20	19
Boh'ians 1905	16	5	4	7	12	27	19
C Budejovice	16	3	4	9	17	32	13
Ostrava	16	2	4	10	12	27	10
Olomouc*	16	3	7	6	15	20	7
Zizkov	16	2	1	13	10	31	7

League now on winter break until Feb 17
30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated
**9pts deducted for match-fixing*

DENMARK

DENMARK	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Copenhagen	18	12	3	3	31	16	39
Nordsjaelland	18	11	2	5	25	13	35
Midtjylland	18	9	3	6	27	26	30
Horsens	18	8	5	5	30	22	29
AGF	18	7	8	3	24	16	29
Silkeborg	18	7	5	6	28	25	26
AaB	18	7	5	6	27	25	26
OB	18	7	4	7	32	30	25
SonderjyskE	18	5	6	7	21	28	21
Brondby	18	4	6	8	20	23	18
Lyngby	18	3	3	12	17	33	12
HB Koge	18	1	4	13	16	41	7

League now on winter break until Mar 3
33-round season (11x3); bottom 2 will be relegated

ENGLAND

Saturday, December 10
Arsenal 1 (Van Persie 70)
Everton 0 Att: 60,062

Bolton 1 (Klasnic 55)
Aston Villa 2 (Albrighton 33, Petrov 39) Att: 20,285

Liverpool 1 (Suarez 47)
Queens Park Rangers 0 Att: 45,016

Manchester United 4 (Nani 17, 56, Rooney 27, 62)
Wolverhampton 1 (Fletcher 47) Att: 75,627

Norwich 4 (Hoolahan 39, Holt 59, 82, Morison 63)
Newcastle 2 (Ba 45+1, 71) Att: 26,816

Swansea 2 (Sinclair 56, Graham 90+1)
Fulham 0 Att: 19,296

West Bromwich 1 (Reid 33)
Wigan 2 (Moses 37, Jordi Gomez pen 57)
Att: 25,446

Sunday, December 11
Stoke 2 (Etherington 13, 43)
Tottenham 1 (Adebayor pen 62) Att: 27,529

Sunderland 2 (Vaughan 84, Larsson 90+2)
Blackburn 1 (Vukcevic 17) Att: 39,863

Monday, December 12
Chelsea 2 (Raul Meireles 34, Lampard pen 83)
Manchester City 1 (Balotelli 2) Att: 41,730

Saturday, December 17
Blackburn 1 (Dann 72)
West Bromwich 2 (Morrison 52, Odemwingie 89)
Att: 22,909

Everton 1 (Osman 81)
Norwich 1 (Holt 28) Att: 31,004

Fulham 2 (Dempsey 32, Ruiz 34)
Bolton 0 Att: 25,643

Newcastle 0
Swansea 0 Att: 51,767

Wigan 1 (Jordi Gomez 88)
Chelsea 1 (Sturridge 59) Att: 18,320

Wolverhampton 1 (Hunt pen 17)
Stoke 2 (Doyle og 58, Crouch 70) Att: 24,684

Sunday, December 18
Aston Villa 0
Liverpool 2 (Bellamy 11, Skrtel 15) Att: 37,460

Manchester City 1 (Silva 53)
Arsenal 0 Att: 47,303

Queens Park Rangers 0
Manchester United 2 (Rooney 1, Carrick 56)
Att: 18,033

Tottenham 1 (Pavlyuchenko 61)
Sunderland 0 Att: 36,021

Tuesday, December 20
Blackburn 1 (Yakubu 67)
Bolton 2 (M Davies 5, Reo-Coker 30) Att: 25,570

Wolverhampton 2 (Ebanks-Blake 37, Zubar 82)
Norwich 2 (Surman 12, Jackson 76) Att: 27,067

Wednesday, December 21
Aston Villa 1 (Albrighton 54)
Arsenal 2 (Van Persie pen 17, Benayoun 87)
Att: 35,818

Everton 1 (Osman 60)
Swansea 0 Att: 32,004

Fulham 0
Manchester United 5 (Welbeck 5, Nani 26, Giggs 43, Rooney 88, Berbatov 90) Att: 25,700

Manchester City 3 (Aguero 29, 54, Johnson 36)
Stoke 0 Att: 46,321

Newcastle 2 (Ba 34, 81)
West Bromwich 3 (Odemwingie 20, McAuley 44, Scharner 85) Att: 51,060

Queens Park Rangers 2 (Helguson 63, Mackie 67)
Sunderland 3 (Bendtner 19, Sessegnon 53, Brown 89) Att: 16,167

Wigan 0
Liverpool 0 Att: 19,230

Thursday, December 22
Tottenham 1 (Adebayor 8)
Chelsea 1 (Sturridge 23) Att: 36,141

Monday, December 26
Bolton 0
Newcastle 2 (Ben Arfa 69, Ba 71) Att: 26,080

Chelsea 1 (Mata 47)
Fulham 1 (Dempsey 56) Att: 41,548

Liverpool 1 (Rodriguez 53)
Blackburn 1 (Adam og 45) Att: 44,441

Manchester United 5 (Park 8, Berbatov 41, 58, pen 78, Valencia 75)
Wigan 0 Att: 75,183

Stoke 0
Aston Villa 0 Att: 27,739

Sunderland 1 (Colback 26)
Everton 1 (Baines pen 51) Att: 43,619

West Bromwich 0
Manchester City 0 Att: 25,938

Tuesday, December 27
Arsenal 1 (Gervinho 8)
Wolverhampton 1 (Fletcher 38) Att: 59,686

Norwich 0
Tottenham 2 (Bale 55, 67) Att: 26,807

Swansea 1 (Graham 14)
Queens Park Rangers 1 (Mackie 58) Att: 19,530

Friday, December 30
Liverpool 3 (Bellamy 29, 67, Gerrard 78)
Newcastle 1 (Agger og 25) Att: 44,372

Saturday, December 31
Arsenal 1 (Van Persie 60)
Queens Park Rangers 0 Att: 60,067

Bolton 1 (Ricketts 22)
Wolverhampton 1 (Fletcher 49) Att: 20,354

Chelsea 1 (Drogba pen 23)
Aston Villa 3 (Ireland 28, Petrov 83, Bent 86)
Att: 41,332

Going ahead...Ledley (far left) settles Glasgow's Old Firm game

SCOTLAND

Standing back?

The Scottish Premier League has invited clubs to apply for permission to reintroduce standing areas at stadiums after relaxing rules requiring supporters to be seated.

The SPL, which previously required teams to use only seated areas with a minimum 6,000 seats per stadium, is not subject to the law banning standing at top-flight football in England.

Celtic went top for the first time this season after beating rivals Rangers 1-0 with a goal from Joe Ledley.

SPAIN

Club president jailed

Sevilla president Jose Maria del Nido was sentenced to

Double...Tello scored twice

CLUB FOOTBALL

Manchester United 2 (Berbatov 52, 62)
Blackburn 3 (Yakubu pen 16, 51, Hanley 80) Att: 75,146

Norwich 1 (Jackson 90+4)
Fulham 1 (Sa 7) Att: 26,406

Stoke 2 (Walters pen 77, Jerome 84)
Wigan 2 (Moses 45, Watson pen 87) Att: 26,595

Swansea 1 (Sinclair 84)
Tottenham 1 (Van der Vaart 44) Att: 20,393

Sunday, January 1
Sunderland 1 (Ji 90+3)
Manchester City 0 Att: 40,625

West Bromwich 0
Everton 1 (Anichebe 87) Att: 23,038

Monday, January 2
Aston Villa 0
Swansea 2 (Dyer 4, Routledge 47) Att: 35,642

Blackburn 1 (Goodwillie 69)
Stoke 2 (Crouch 17, 45) Att: 20,615

Fulham 2 (Sidwell 85, Zamora 90+2)
Arsenal 1 (Koscielny 21) Att: 25,700

Queens Park Rangers 1 (Barton 11)
Norwich 2 (Pilkington 42, Morison 83) Att: 18,033

Wolverhampton 1 (Ward 84)
Chelsea 2 (Ramires 54, Lampard 89) Att: 27,289

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man City	19	14	3	2	53	16	45
Man United	19	14	3	2	49	17	45
Tottenham	18	12	3	3	35	20	39
Chelsea	20	11	4	5	39	25	37
Arsenal	20	11	3	6	36	28	36
Liverpool	19	9	7	3	24	15	34
Newcastle	19	8	6	5	26	25	30
Stoke	20	8	5	7	22	31	29
Norwich	20	6	7	7	30	35	25
Everton	18	7	3	8	19	20	24
Swansea	20	5	8	7	20	23	23
Aston Villa	20	5	8	7	22	26	23
Fulham	20	5	8	7	22	26	23
West Brom	19	6	4	9	19	27	22
Sunderland	19	5	6	8	23	22	21
Wolves	20	4	5	11	22	36	17
QPR	20	4	5	11	19	35	17
Wigan	19	3	6	10	17	37	15
Blackburn	20	3	5	12	29	43	14
Bolton	19	4	1	14	23	42	13

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading scorers
17 Robin Van Persie (Arsenal)
14 Demba Ba (Newcastle)
13 Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)
13 Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)
12 Yakubu Aiyegbeni (Blackburn)
10 Edin Dzeko (Manchester City)

FRANCE

Saturday, December 10
Marseille 0
Bordeaux 0 Att: 40,446

Nancy 2 (Bakar 10, Niculae 90+3)
Ajaccio 2 (Andre Luiz og 34, Cavalli 73) Att: 12,440

Rennes 1 (Danze 30)
Brest 1 (Roux 17) Att: 20,275

Saint-Etienne 2 (Nicolita 10, Sako 74)
Caen 0 Att: 21,244

Sochaux 0
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Gameiro 20) Att: 16,098

Toulouse 2 (Sissoko 25, Umut 89)
Evian 1 (Wass 50) Att: 32,874

Valenciennes 1 (Kadir 46)
Montpellier 0 Att: 14,078

Sunday, December 11
Auxerre 2 (Oliech 13, Sahar 65)
Nice 1 (Mouloungui 21) Att: 7,081

Lille 2 (Sow 16, Hazard 58)
Dijon 0 Att: 16,726

Lorient 0
Lyon 1 (Lacazette 54) Att: 14,998

Saturday, December 17
Brest 1 (Grougi pen 34)
Auxerre 0 Att: 13,677

Caen 1 (Nivet pen 60)
Nancy 2 (Karaboue 3, Sane 56) Att: 13,528

Dijon 1 (Bautheac 90+5)
Saint-Etienne 2 (Sinama-Pongolle 16, Gradel 90+3) Att: 14,435

Lyon 2 (Briand 35, Lopez 70)
Evian 1 (Sagbo 43) Att: 35,253

Marseille 2 (Valbuena 84, Cheyrou 90+5)
Lorient 1 (Emeghara 77) Att: 40,080

Montpellier 1 (Dernis 7)
Toulouse 1 (M'Bengue 40) Att: 16,780

Nice 2 (Mounier 68, 90+3)
Valenciennes 0 Att: 7,358

Sunday, December 18
Ajaccio 1 (Diawara 83)
Rennes 0 Att: 5,645

Bordeaux 1 (Sane 22)
Sochaux 0 Att: 23,700

Paris Saint-Germain 0
Lille 0 Att: 45,195

Tuesday, December 20
Nancy 1 (Lemaitre 37)
Marseille 3 (Valbuena 18, Mbia 41, Gonzalez 90+1) Att: 19,304

Wednesday, December 21
Auxerre 2 (Le Tallec 81, Jemaa 90+1)
Dijon 2 (Corgnet 7, Jovial 34) Att: 14,350

Evian 4 (Barbosa 52, Khelifa 69, Cambon 71, Dja Djedje 75)
Montpellier 2 (Belhanda 47, Giroud 54) Att: 12,336

Lille 4 (Chedjou 9, Cole 27, Hazard 77, Balmont 88)
Nice 4 (Civelli 16, Dja Djedje 35, 45+1, Clerc 90+4) Att: 16,847

Lorient 0
Caen 0 Att: 15,715

Rennes 1 (Kembo 54)
Bordeaux 0 Att: 20,045

Saint-Etienne 0
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Ruffier og 32) Att: 25,136

Sochaux 0
Ajaccio 2 (Andre 66, Peybernes og 78) Att: 9,296

Toulouse 0
Brest 0 Att: 28,097

Valenciennes 1 (Cissokho og 27)
Lyon 0 Att: 16,850

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSG	19	12	4	3	31	17	40
Montpellier	19	11	4	4	39	23	37
Lille	19	9	9	1	33	19	36
Lyon	19	11	2	6	31	21	35
Rennes	19	9	5	5	29	23	32
Marseille	19	8	7	4	27	18	31
Toulouse	19	8	7	4	20	17	31
Saint-Etienne	19	8	6	5	23	21	30
Lorient	19	6	6	7	18	21	24
Bordeaux	19	5	8	6	20	22	23
Evian	19	5	7	7	27	29	22
Brest	19	3	12	4	19	19	21
Valenciennes	19	5	5	9	18	21	20
Caen	19	5	5	9	24	29	20
Auxerre	19	4	7	8	26	30	19
Dijon	19	5	4	10	20	35	19
Nice	19	4	6	9	21	23	18
Nancy	19	4	6	9	17	26	18
Sochaux	19	4	6	9	21	34	18
Ajaccio	19	3	6	10	20	36	15

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading scorers
13 Olivier Giroud (Montpellier)
9 Kevin Gameiro (Paris Saint-Germain)

GERMANY

Friday, December 9
Hertha 1 (Ramos 25)
Schalke 2 (Huntelaar 19, Pukki 44) Att: 52,382

Saturday, December 10
Augsburg 1 (Callsen-Bracker 51)
Monchengladbach 0 Att: 30,660

Cologne 4 (Clemens 19, 66, Podolski 60, 73)
Freiburg 0 Att: 44,500

Hanover 0
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Att: 44,800

Mainz 0
Hamburg 0 Att: 34,000

Nuremberg 0
1899 Hoffenheim 2 (Ibisevic 39, 56) Att: 35,389

Werder Bremen 4 (Papastathopoulos 18, Pizarro 45, Rosenberg 55, Arnautovic 71)
Wolfsburg 1 (Schafer 86) Att: 39,124

Sunday, December 11
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Kagawa 27)
Kaiserslautern 1 (Sahan 60) Att: 80,720

Stuttgart 1 (Gentner 6)
Bayern Munich 2 (Gomez 13, 57) Att: 60,469

Tuesday, December 13
Cologne 1 (Podolski 85)
Mainz 1 (Allagui 70) Att: 44,800

Friday, December 16
Bayern Munich 3 (Gomez 48, Alaba 63, Kroos 88)
Cologne 0 Att: 69,000

Saturday, December 17
Bayer Leverkusen 0
Nuremberg 3 (Didavi 8, Hegeler 22, Pekhart 73) Att: 29,239

Freiburg 1 (Rosenthal 34)
Borussia Dortmund 4 (Lewandowski 7, 70, Gundogan 44, Grosskreutz 59) Att: 24,000

Hamburg 1 (Guerrero 66)
Augsburg 1 (Oehrl 63) Att: 48,143

1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Salihovic 21)
Hertha 1 (Hubnik 90+1) Att: 25,550

Schalke 5 (Raul 16, 20, 63, Papadopoulos 67, Huntelaar 70)
Werder Bremen 0 Att: 61,673

Wolfsburg 1 (Polter 74)
Stuttgart 0 Att: 25,944

Sunday, December 18
Kaiserslautern 1 (Nemec 68)
Hanover 1 (Abdellaoue 13) Att: 36,019

Monchengladbach 1 (Herrmann 5)
Mainz 0 Att: 49,089

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern	17	12	1	4	43	10	37
Dortmund	17	10	4	3	35	12	34
Schalke	17	11	1	5	38	22	34
M'gladbach	17	10	3	4	25	11	33
Werder	17	9	2	6	30	31	29
Leverkusen	17	7	5	5	22	22	26
Hanover	17	5	8	4	20	24	23
Stuttgart	17	6	4	7	23	20	22
Hoffenheim	17	6	4	7	19	19	22
Cologne	17	6	3	8	27	35	21
Hertha	17	4	8	5	24	26	20
Wolfsburg	17	6	2	9	23	34	20
Hamburg	17	4	7	6	21	27	19
Mainz	17	4	6	7	22	29	18
Nuremberg	17	5	3	9	17	28	18
Kaiserslautern	17	3	7	7	13	21	16
Augsburg	17	3	6	8	15	28	15
Freiburg	17	3	4	10	21	39	13

League now on winter break until Jan 20
34-round season (17x2); bottom 2 will be relegated. 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

Leading scorers
16 Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich)
15 Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (Schalke)
14 Lukas Podolski (Cologne)

seven-and-a-half years in prison for his role in a corruption case with the Marbella local council.

Del Nido, who had acted as a legal advisor to the council, was one of 16 people involved in the embezzlement of funds from the local government.

The world's number two tennis player Rafa Nadal and his uncle, former Spain and Barcelona defender Miguel Angel Nadal, have sold their 10 per cent shareholding in Real Mallorca.

In the Spanish Cup, Barcelona thrashed Hospitalet 9-0 in the second leg of their tie as they cruised into the last 16. Pedro, Andres Iniesta, Thiago Alcantara (two), Xavi, Cristian Tello (two) and Isaac Cuenca (two) were the goal scorers.

SWITZERLAND

Sion penalty allows clubs to play on

The Swiss FA docked Sion 36 points in a long-running dispute over the club's fielding of ineligible players.

The club were penalised three points for every league and cup game in which ineligible players were fielded, leaving Sion bottom of the league with minus five points.

The decision means that Swiss teams will not now be banned from world football by FIFA, even though football's world governing body wanted 3-0 losses to be awarded for all the matches in question, which would have meant opposing teams gaining the points deducted from the club.

Sion will be allowed to continue in the Swiss Cup.

Owner...Sion's Christian Constantin

GREECE

Dec 7: Doxa 0 OFI 1.
Dec 10: Xanthi 1 Levadiakos 1; PAOK 3 Atromitos 1; AEK 2 Giannina 1.
Dec 11: Panetolikos 1 OFI 0; Asteras 1 Aris 0; Panionios 1 Panathinaikos 2; Ergotelis 2 Doxa 1; Kerkyra 0 Olympiakos 4.
Dec 14: Levadiakos 0 Olympiakos 4.
Dec 17: Levadiakos 0 Ergotelis 1; Panathinaikos 3 Asteras 1; Xanthi 1 Panionios 0.
Dec 18: OFI 0 Kerkyra 0; Doxa 0 PAOK 2; Aris 0 Panetolikos 0; Atromitos 1 AEK 0; Olympiakos 2 Giannina 0.
Dec 28: OFI 0 Levadiakos 1; Aris 2 Doxa 0.

GREECE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	14	10	3	1	35	12	33
Panathinaikos	12	9	2	1	29	14	29
AEK	14	9	1	4	22	16	28
Atromitos	13	6	5	2	14	13	23
PAOK	14	6	4	4	20	13	22
Xanthi	14	6	3	5	20	15	21
OFI	14	5	4	5	16	14	19
Ergotelis	14	5	3	6	15	18	18
Panetolikos	12	4	3	5	10	14	15
Aris	13	3	5	5	11	13	14
Panionios	14	3	4	7	12	17	13
Asteras	12	3	3	6	7	15	12
Giannina	12	2	4	6	12	18	10
Levadiakos	8	2	3	3	5	9	9
Kerkyra	12	1	4	7	7	19	7
Doxa	8	0	1	7	1	16	1

30-round season (15x2); teams placed 2nd to 5th will enter play-offs to determine Greece's 2nd Champions League representatives, bottom 3 will be relegated

HOLLAND

Dec 7: Excelsior 0 AZ 0.
Dec 9: Den Haag 2 Heracles 0.
Dec 10: Twente 2 NEC 0; AZ 4 De Graafschap 0; Excelsior 0 Heerenveen 5; PSV 1 NAC 0.
Dec 11: VVV 2 Roda JC 0; RKC 0 Ajax 1; Utrecht 2 Feyenoord 2; Vitesse 0 Groningen 0.
Dec 16: De Graafschap 1 RKC 3.
Dec 17: Heracles 0 Vitesse 1; NEC 2 VVV 0; Roda JC 7 Excelsior 0; Groningen 1 Utrecht 0.
Dec 18: Ajax 4 Den Haag 0; NAC 2 AZ 1; Feyenoord 3 Twente 2; Heerenveen 1 PSV 5.

HOLLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AZ	17	12	2	3	36	15	38
PSV	17	11	4	2	48	19	37
Twente	17	9	6	2	43	18	33
Ajax	17	9	6	2	46	23	33
Feyenoord	17	9	4	4	34	22	31
Vitesse	17	8	5	4	23	16	29
Heerenveen	17	7	7	3	39	28	28
Groningen	17	7	5	5	29	28	26
Roda JC	17	8	0	9	29	38	24
NAC	17	6	3	8	24	28	21
Den Haag	17	6	3	8	22	31	21
Heracles	17	5	5	7	27	25	20
RKC	17	5	3	9	17	28	18
Utrecht	17	4	5	8	28	35	17
NEC	17	5	2	10	17	27	17
De Graafschap	17	3	3	11	16	39	12
VVV	17	2	4	11	16	42	10
Excelsior	17	1	5	11	9	41	8

League now on winter break until Jan 20
34-round season (17x2); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd & 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

ISRAEL

Regular season

Dec 10: Ramat HaSharon 0 Hapoel Petah Tikva 0; Bnei Sakhnin 1 Ashdod 2; Rishon LeZion 0 Be'er Sheva 1; Maccabi Petah Tikva 0 Acre 4; Maccabi Tel Aviv 1 Netanya 1; Maccabi Haifa 1 Hapoel Haifa 3.
Dec 11: Bnei Yehuda 3 Beitar 0.
Dec 12: Kiryat Shmona 1 Hapoel Tel Aviv 0.
Dec 17: Bnei Yehuda 4 Acre 1; Beitar 0 Be'er Sheva 1; Bnei Sakhnin 1 Rishon LeZion 0; Ramat HaSharon 1 Ashdod 1; Kiryat Shmona 1 Hapoel Haifa 0; Maccabi Tel Aviv 1 Hapoel Petah Tikva 0.
Dec 18: Maccabi Petah Tikva 1 Hapoel Tel Aviv 0.
Dec 19: Maccabi Haifa 2 Netanya 1.
Dec 24: Hapoel Petah Tikva 3 Maccabi Haifa 1; Hapoel Haifa 1 Maccabi Petah Tikva 1; Rishon LeZion 1 Ramat HaSharon 1; Be'er Sheva 0 Bnei Sakhnin 2; Netanya 0 Kiryat Shmona 1; Hapoel Tel Aviv 1 Bnei Yehuda 1.
Dec 25: Acre 1 Beitar 1; Ashdod 2 Maccabi Tel Aviv 1.
Dec 27: Bnei Yehuda 1 Hapoel Haifa 0.
Dec 28: Be'er Sheva 2 Acre 1; Maccabi Petah Tikva 0 Netanya 1; Kiryat Shmona 2 Hapoel Petah Tikva 0; Ramat HaSharon 0 Bnei Sakhnin 1; Maccabi Tel Aviv 3 Rishon LeZion 1; Maccabi Haifa 1 Ashdod 1; Beitar 1 Hapoel Tel Aviv 1.
Dec 31: Bnei Sakhnin 1 Maccabi Tel Aviv 3; Netanya 1 Bnei Yehuda 0; Hapoel Petah Tikva 1 Maccabi Petah Tikva 0; Rishon LeZion 4 Maccabi Haifa 2; Ramat HaSharon 3 Be'er Sheva 3; Hapoel Tel Aviv 2 Acre 1.
Jan 1: Hapoel Haifa 3 Beitar 0.
Jan 2: Ashdod 0 Kiryat Shmona 0.

ISRAEL – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kiryat Shmona	19	12	6	1	23	8	42
Ashdod	19	10	6	3	26	18	36
H Tel Aviv	19	10	5	4	33	12	35
Bnei Sakhnin*	19	10	3	6	30	21	31
M Tel Aviv	19	9	3	7	29	22	30
Netanya	19	8	5	6	27	24	29
R HaSharon	19	7	6	6	23	25	27
M Haifa	19	7	5	7	33	30	26
Bnei Yehuda	19	7	5	7	20	17	26
Acre	19	7	4	8	30	25	25
M Petah Tikva	19	5	6	8	17	28	21
Be'er Sheva	19	5	3	11	19	33	18
H Haifa	19	4	5	10	18	24	17
Beitar	19	4	5	10	12	27	17
Rishon LeZion	19	3	6	10	21	39	15
H Petah Tikva**	19	4	7	8	15	23	10

30-round regular season (15x2); top 8 will form championship group, bottom 8 will form relegation group (from which 3 will go down)
**2pts deducted for contract irregularities*
***9pts deducted for going into administration*

ITALY

Saturday, December 10
Internazionale 2 (Pazzini 41, Nagatomo 49)
Fiorentina 0 Att: 55,000

Lecce 2 (Di Michele pen 12, Ferrario 59)
Lazio 3 (Klose 28, 87, Cana 47) Att: 10,000

Palermo 0
Cesena 1 (Mutu 64) Att: 23,000

Siena 0
Genoa 2 (Rossi 57, Palacio 90+2) Att: 12,000

Sunday, December 11
Atalanta 1 (Tiribocchi 71)
Catania 1 (Legrottaglie 18) Att: 13,716

Bologna 2 (Di Vaio 11, Diamanti 73)
Milan 2 (Seedorf 16, Ibrahimovic pen 72)
Att: 25,736

Cagliari 0
Parma 0 Att: 10,000

Novara 1 (Radovanovic 70)
Napoli 1 (Dzemaili 84) Att: 16,282

Udinese 2 (Di Natale 67, Basta 79)
Chievo 1 (Paloschi 82) Att: 16,062

Monday, December 12
Roma 1 (De Rossi 6)
Juventus 1 (Chiellini 61) Att: 49,547

Tuesday, December 13
Genoa 0
Internazionale 1 (Nagatomo 67) Att: 23,708

Saturday, December 17
Chievo 2 (Thereau 35, Sardo 57)
Cagliari 0 Att: 12,000

Fiorentina 2 (Gilardino 9, Jovetic 88)
Atalanta 2 (Masiello 81, Denis 86) Att: 24,000

Milan 2 (Nocerino 55, Ibrahimovic pen 64)
Siena 0 Att: 51,000

Sunday, December 18
Catania 2 (Lodi 32, Lopez pen 61)
Palermo 0 Att: 16,471

Cesena 0
Internazionale 1 (Ranocchia 63) Att: 20,183

Genoa 2 (Rossi 39, Pratto 85)
Bologna 1 (Ramirez 51) Att: 19,278

Juventus 2 (Pepe 4, Quagliarella 75)
Novara 0 Att: 38,318

Lazio 2 (Lulic 43, Klose 51)
Udinese 2 (Floro Flores 28, Pinzi 73) Att: 31,884

Napoli 1 (Hamsik 82)
Roma 3 (De Sanctis og 3, Osvaldo 59, Simplicio 90) Att: 53,648

Parma 3 (Floccari pen 17, Pelle 86, Galloppa 90+3)
Lecce 3 (Di Michele 58, 61, Cuadrado 76)
Att: 12,161

Tuesday, December 20
Cagliari 0
Milan 2 (Pisano og 4, Ibrahimovic 60) Att: 18,000

Siena 0
Fiorentina 0 Att: 9,117

Wednesday, December 21
Atalanta 4 (Denis pen 17, Marilungo 18, 44, Peluso 71)
Cesena 1 (Candreva 12) Att: 16,081

Bologna 0
Roma 2 (Taddei 17, Osvaldo 40) Att: 16,055

Internazionale 4 (Pazzini 34, Milito 49, Cambiasso 74, Alvarez 81)
Lecce 1 (Muriel 19) Att: 39,602

Lazio 0
Chievo 0 Att: 26,217

Napoli 6 (Cavani 12, 25, Hamsik 17, Pandev 45+2, Gargano 49, Zuniga 80)
Genoa 1 (Jorquera 28) Att: 43,141

Novara 2 (Mazzarani 77, Rigoni 84)
Palermo 2 (Ludi og 20, Bertolo 74) Att: 8,392

Parma 3 (Modesto 5, Biabiany 23, Floccari 44)
Catania 3 (Almiron 22, Lodi pen 74, Catellani 85)
Att: 10,800

Udinese 0
Juventus 0 Att: 28,588

ITALY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Milan	16	10	4	2	35	16	34
Juventus	16	9	7	0	27	11	34
Udinese	16	9	5	2	20	9	32
Lazio	16	8	6	2	24	13	30
Inter	16	8	2	6	22	19	26
Napoli	16	6	6	4	29	18	24
Roma	16	7	3	6	21	19	24
Catania	16	5	7	4	20	23	22
Palermo	16	6	3	7	18	20	21
Genoa	16	6	3	7	19	24	21
Atalanta*	16	6	8	2	23	19	20
Chievo	16	5	5	6	13	18	20
Parma	16	5	4	7	21	26	19
Fiorentina	16	4	6	6	15	15	18
Cagliari	16	4	6	6	12	17	18
Siena	16	3	6	7	14	16	15
Bologna	16	4	3	9	14	24	15
Novara	16	2	6	8	17	29	12
Cesena	16	3	3	10	8	20	12
Lecce	16	2	3	11	17	33	9

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated
**6pts deducted because of involvement in match-fixing scandal*

Leading scorers
12 German Denis (Atalanta)
11 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)
10 Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)
9 Edinson Cavani (Napoli)
9 Miroslav Klose (Lazio)

POLAND

Dec 9: Podbeskidzie 1 GKS 0; Wisla 0 Polonia 1.
Dec 10: Ruch 4 Korona 1; Widzew 2 Gornik 0; Legia 0 Cracovia 0.
Dec 11: LKS 1 Slask 2; Lechia 0 Jagiellonia 1.
Dec 12: Lech 3 Zaglebie 2.

POLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slask	17	12	1	4	31	13	37
Legia	17	10	3	4	29	10	33
Polonia	17	9	4	4	19	15	31
Ruch	17	9	2	6	26	18	29
Lech	17	8	4	5	29	12	28
Wisla	17	8	3	6	16	13	27
Widzew	17	6	7	4	14	12	25
Korona	17	6	7	4	18	19	25
Podbeskidzie	17	6	5	6	15	19	23
Jagiellonia	17	6	4	7	20	27	22
Gornik	17	5	5	7	18	21	20
Lechia	17	4	5	8	8	15	17
GKS	17	4	4	9	20	20	16
LKS	17	4	3	10	12	34	15
Cracovia	17	3	5	9	9	19	14
Zaglebie	17	3	4	10	15	32	13

League now on winter break until Feb 17
30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

UKRAINE

Dynamo victorious

Dynamo Kiev entered the winter break a point clear of Shakhtar Donetsk and unbeaten in the league after winning 1-0 at Karpaty Lviv, who were playing their first game at the new Arena Lviv – which is one of the country's four selected venues for the Euro finals this summer.

Kiev No1...Andriy Shevchenko

PARAGUAY

Olimpia again at last

Three-times Libertadores champions Olimpia won their first Paraguayan league title in 11 years, beating Rubio Nu 2-1 on the last day of the season to clinch the clausura.

Maximiliano Biancucchi – who is Lionel Messi's cousin – and Francisco Najera scored the goals that saw Uruguayan coach Gerardo Pelusso's side finish three points ahead of arch-rivals Cerro Porteno, who were held 2-2 by Sol de America.

Libertad, the country's most successful club of the past decade with seven league titles, finished third.

Apertura winners Nacional were fourth, while 3 de Febrero and General Caballero were relegated.

VENEZUELA

Lara are champions

Deportivo Lara won their first-ever championship, beating Caracas to the apertura title by five points and coming from behind to win 3-2 at bottom-of-the-table Carabobo on the final weekend to preserve their unbeaten league record.

Veteran striker Rafael Castellin, who is now 36,

PORTUGAL

Dec 9: Braga 5 Pacos Ferreira 2.
Dec 10: Beira Mar 1 Porto 2; Sporting 1 Nacional 0.
Dec 11: Rio Ave 2 Gil Vicente 0; Setubal 1 Feirense 1; Uniao Leiria 1 Guimaraes 0; Maritimo 0 Benfica 1.
Dec 12: Olhanense 0 Academica 2.
Dec 16: Benfica 5 Rio Ave 1.
Dec 17: Guimaraes 1 Gil Vicente 1; Porto 2 Maritimo 0.
Dec 18: Feirense 2 Uniao Leiria 1; Nacional 1 Setubal 1; Pacos Ferreira 0 Beira Mar 3; Academica 1 Sporting 1.
Dec 19: Olhanense 3 Braga 4.

PORTUGAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto	13	10	3	0	32	8	33
Benfica	13	10	3	0	30	11	33
Sporting	13	8	3	2	26	12	27
Braga	13	7	4	2	24	12	25
Maritimo	13	6	4	3	18	16	22
Academica	13	5	2	6	17	17	17
Beira Mar	13	4	4	5	11	8	16
Gil Vicente	13	3	6	4	13	20	15
Guimaraes	13	4	2	7	18	16	14
Olhanense	13	3	5	5	14	17	14
Feirense	13	3	5	5	11	19	14
Setubal	13	3	4	6	9	19	13
Uniao Leiria	13	4	0	9	14	23	12
Nacional	13	3	3	7	9	24	12
Rio Ave	13	3	2	8	12	19	11
P Ferreira	13	2	2	9	13	30	8

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

ROMANIA

Dec 9: Tirgu-Mures 0 Brasov 0.
Dec 10: Universitatea 0 Vaslui 1; Steaua 1 CFR 1.
Dec 11: Sportul 1 Petrolul 1; Mioveni 1 Vointa 2; Otelul 2 Rapid 0; Astra 0 Dinamo 0.
Dec 12: Gaz Metan 3 Ceahlaul 1; Pandurii 5 Concordia 2.
Dec 16: Gaz Metan 1 Brasov 1.
Dec 17: Sportul 2 Concordia 2; Astra 0 CFR 1; Tirgu-Mures 0 Dinamo 1.
Dec 18: Pandurii 1 Ceahlaul 1; Universitatea 2 Mioveni 2; Otelul 1 Petrolul 0.
Dec 19: Steaua 1 Vointa 0.
Dec 20: Vaslui 2 Rapid 3.

ROMANIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	18	12	4	2	32	10	40
CFR	18	12	3	3	37	14	39
Rapid	18	11	4	3	30	17	37
Steaua	18	9	5	4	24	14	32
Otelul	18	9	4	5	17	14	31
Pandurii	18	8	6	4	29	18	30
Vaslui	18	9	3	6	28	17	30
Universitatea	18	7	7	4	24	18	28
Astra	18	6	7	5	17	17	25
Ceahlaul	18	5	7	6	16	23	22
Gaz Metan	18	6	3	9	26	31	21
Brasov	18	5	5	8	18	17	20
Petrolul	18	4	6	8	15	21	18
Vointa	18	4	5	9	12	22	17
Tirgu-Mures	18	3	7	8	17	25	16
Sportul	18	2	8	8	17	31	14
Concordia	18	2	5	11	12	32	11
Mioveni	18	2	3	13	12	42	9

League now on winter break
34-round season (17x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

RUSSIA

Division split after 30-round regular season; teams carried forward full points and goals record

RUSSIA – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit	32	18	11	3	61	26	65
CSKA	32	16	11	5	60	33	59
Dynamo	32	17	7	8	53	33	58
Spartak M	32	16	9	7	51	34	57
Rubin	32	15	10	7	44	28	55
Lokomotiv	32	15	8	9	50	34	53
Anzhi	32	14	10	8	40	33	52
Kuban	32	14	8	10	40	30	50

14-round campaign (7x2)

RUSSIA – RELEGATION GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Krasnodar	32	11	9	12	41	45	42
Rostov	32	9	9	14	35	47	36
Terek	32	8	8	16	29	48	32
Amkar	32	7	10	15	23	41	31
Krylia Sovetov	32	7	10	15	22	43	31
Volga	32	8	4	20	25	43	28
Spartak N	32	6	9	17	28	43	27
Tom	32	4	9	19	20	61	21

14-round campaign (7x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd & 4th bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

League now on winter break until Mar 2

SCOTLAND

Regular season

Dec 10: Hibernian 0 Rangers 2; Inverness 2 Dundee United 3; St Johnstone 0 Motherwell 3; Aberdeen 2 St Mirren 2; Celtic 1 Hearts 0.
Dec 13: St Johnstone 1 Aberdeen 2.
Dec 17: Aberdeen 1 Hibernian 0; Rangers 2 Inverness 1; Hearts 4 Dunfermline 0; Kilmarnock 1 Dundee United 1; Motherwell 1 St Mirren 1.
Dec 18: St Johnstone 0 Celtic 2.
Dec 24: Inverness 2 Aberdeen 1; St Mirren 2 Rangers 1; Hearts 2 Motherwell 0; Celtic 2 Kilmarnock 1; Dundee United 3 Hibernian 1; Dunfermline 0 St Johnstone 3.
Dec 28: Aberdeen 0 Hearts 0; Celtic 1 Rangers 0; Hibernian 1 Inverness 1; St Johnstone 2 Kilmarnock 0; St Mirren 2 Dundee United 2.
Jan 2: Hibernian 1 Hearts 3; Dundee United 1 Aberdeen 2; Dunfermline 0 Celtic 3; Kilmarnock 2 St Mirren 1; Rangers 3 Motherwell 0.

SCOTLAND – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	22	17	2	3	44	15	53
Rangers	22	16	3	3	40	12	51
Motherwell	20	10	4	6	24	24	34
Hearts	22	9	5	8	25	15	32
St Johnstone	21	9	5	7	26	20	32
Dundee Utd	22	6	8	8	31	35	26
Kilmarnock	21	6	8	7	27	31	26
St Mirren	22	6	8	8	23	29	26
Aberdeen	22	6	6	10	25	29	24
Inverness	21	5	4	12	28	40	19
Hibernian	21	3	6	12	19	36	15
Dunfermline	20	3	5	12	20	46	14

33-round regular season (11x3); top 6 will form championship group, bottom 6 will form relegation group (from which the bottom team will go down)

SERBIA

Dec 10: Metalac 0 Partizan 3; Borac 0 Spartak 1; BSK 1 Javor 1; Novi Pazar 0 Jagodina 0; Sloboda Sevojno 1 OFK 2; Red Star 0 Vojvodina 2; Smederevo 3 Hajduk 0.
Dec 11: Radnicki 4 Rad 2.

SERBIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Partizan	15	14	0	1	36	5	42
Red Star	15	10	2	3	27	12	32
Vojvodina	15	8	6	1	30	9	30
Radnicki	15	7	7	1	24	14	28
S Sevojno	15	7	4	4	21	19	25
Spartak	15	6	7	2	14	12	25
OFK	15	7	1	7	19	20	22
Jagodina	15	5	5	5	14	13	20
Hajduk	15	5	3	7	13	21	18
Smederevo	15	5	2	8	12	17	17
Javor	15	4	3	8	9	17	15
Rad	15	3	5	7	17	16	14
BSK	15	3	5	7	9	20	14
Novi Pazar	15	2	5	8	9	24	11
Borac	15	1	5	9	6	21	8
Metalac	15	1	4	10	8	28	7

League now on winter break until Mar 3
30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

SLOVAKIA

SLOVAKIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zilina	18	9	6	3	29	19	33
Slovan	18	9	5	4	26	20	32
Spartak	18	9	5	4	22	17	32
Senica	18	8	7	3	25	14	31
Zlate Moravce	18	8	6	4	20	16	30
Ruzomberok	18	7	7	4	25	16	28
Nitra	18	4	10	4	18	17	22
Dukla	18	6	3	9	24	26	21
Trencin	18	4	7	7	21	26	19
Kosice	18	4	6	8	19	26	18
Tatran	18	2	6	10	9	23	12
DAC	18	4	0	14	11	29	12

League now on winter break until Feb 24
33-round season (11x3); bottom team will be relegated

SPAIN

Wednesday, December 7
Granada 2 (Siqueira 53, Martins 58)
Mallorca 2 (Victor 23, Hemed pen 65)

Saturday, December 10
Betis 2 (Ruben Castro 90+1, 90+4)
Valencia 1 (Dorado og 66) Att: 30,000

Levante 1 (Nano 55)
Sevilla 0 Att: 11,131

Real Madrid 1 (Benzema 1)
Barcelona 3 (Sanchez 29, Marcelo og 53, Fabregas 66) Att: 79,900

Sunday, December 11
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Aurtenetxe 79)
Racing Santander 1 (Alvaro 90+2) Att: 34,000

Espanyol 4 (Verdu 5, 7, Romaric 19, Sergio Garcia 54)
Atletico Madrid 2 (Falcao 32, Arda 83) Att: 20,823

Getafe 1 (Casquero 80)
Granada 0 Att: 10,500

Malaga 1 (Juanmi 70)
Osasuna 1 (Balde 32) Att: 28,000

Rayo Vallecano 1 (Michu 90)
Sporting Gijon 3 (Barral 9, Nacho Novo 36, 66) Att: 11,000

Villarreal 1 (Marco Ruben 71)
Real Sociedad 1 (Aranburu 51) Att: 16,000

Zaragoza 0
Mallorca 1 (Victor 39) Att: 22,000

Saturday, December 17
Athletic Bilbao 2 (Susaeta 7, Toquero 87)
Zaragoza 1 (Ponzio pen 21) Att: 28,000

Mallorca 1 (Ramis 10)
Getafe 2 (Barrada 27, 44) Att: 10,000

Sevilla 2 (Jesus Navas 69, Negredo 90+1)
Real Madrid 6 (Cristiano Ronaldo 10, 41, pen 84, Callejon 37, Di Maria 66, Altintop 89) Att: 40,000

Sporting Gijon 1 (Barral 59)
Espanyol 2 (Thievy 2, Sergio Garcia 84) Att: 22,000

Sunday, December 18
Atletico Madrid 0
Betis 2 (Pozuelo 53, Santa Cruz 90) Att: 32,000

Granada 2 (Siqueira pen 35, Abel 44)
Levante 1 (Kone 60) Att: 18,000

Osasuna 2 (Balde 74, Sergio 82)
Villarreal 1 (Marco Ruben 64) Att: 14,241

Racing Santander 0
Real Sociedad 0 Att: 9,000

Valencia 2 (Soldado 36, 60)
Malaga 0 Att: 35,000

SPAIN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	16	13	1	2	56	15	40
Barcelona	16	11	4	1	50	8	37
Valencia	16	10	3	3	26	16	33
Levante	16	9	2	5	25	19	29
Osasuna	16	6	7	3	21	28	25
Sevilla	16	6	6	4	18	17	24
Malaga	16	7	3	6	20	22	24
Espanyol	16	7	2	7	17	20	23
Athletic	16	5	7	4	23	19	22
Atletico	16	5	4	7	23	27	19
Betis	16	6	1	9	17	22	19
Getafe	16	5	4	7	17	23	19
Granada	16	5	4	7	10	16	19
Mallorca	16	4	6	6	15	22	18
Sociedad	16	4	5	7	16	23	17
Vallecano	16	4	4	8	17	25	16
Villarreal	16	3	6	7	13	23	15
Gijon	16	4	3	9	16	27	15
Santander	16	2	8	6	11	21	14
Zaragoza	16	2	4	10	13	31	10

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading scorers
20 Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
17 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
12 Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)
11 Roberto Soldado (Valencia)
9 Radamel Falcao (Atletico Madrid)

scored 11 goals in 17 games after joining Lara from Real Espoor – two less than the top scorer, Richard Blanco of Deportivo Petare.

Lara will now enter the 2013 Libertadores Cup and will contest the Venezuelan Serie Final with the winners of the clausura.

Mineros de Guayana beat Trujillanos 3-1 on aggregate in the Final of the Venezuelan Cup.

Sent off...goalkeeper Sanchez

MEXICO

Tigres take title

Tigres claimed their first Mexican championship since 1982, beating Santos Laguna 4-1 on aggregate in the Final.

After winning the away leg 1-0, Tigres made the most of Santos goalkeeper Oswaldo Sanchez being sent off after 11 minutes in the return to win with second-half goals from Hector Mancilla, Danilinho and Alan Pulido. Santos' Felipe Baloy and Israel Jimenez of Tigres were also dismissed during the second leg.

CAMEROON

Domestic double

Coton Sport finished 11 points clear of Les Astres in the league and beat Unisport Bafang on penalties in the Cup Final after a 0-0 draw.

MOROCCO

More silverware

Maghreb Fes added the Moroccan Cup to their Confederations Cup success, beating CO Meknes 1-0 in the Final with a goal from Brazilian import Luiz Jeferson Escher.

SWITZERLAND

Dec 10: Thun 1 Young Boys 1; Zurich 1 Sion 1.
Dec 11: Lausanne 2 Grasshopper 1; Lucerne 1 Servette 2; Xamax 1 Basle 1.

SWITZERLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Basle	18	11	5	2	38	17	38
Lucerne	18	9	4	5	25	15	31
Young Boys	18	7	6	5	26	17	27
Servette	18	7	3	8	25	29	24
Thun	18	6	5	7	21	21	23
Xamax*	18	7	5	6	22	22	22
Zurich	18	6	3	9	26	26	21
Grasshopper	18	6	1	11	19	36	19
Lausanne	18	3	2	13	16	44	11
Sion**	18	9	4	5	26	17	-5

League now on winter break until Feb 4
36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off
**4pts deducted for violating licensing regulations*
***36pts deducted for fielding ineligible players in 12 league games*

TURKEY

Regular season

Dec 7: Eskisehirspor 1 Antalyaspor 0; Karabukspor 0 Gaziantepspor 0; Galatasaray 3 Fenerbahce 1.
Dec 8: Istanbul BB 0 Mersin 0; Ankaragucu 0 Bursaspor 0; Samsunspor 0 Kayserispor 1; Manisaspor 1 Besiktas 4; Orduspor 1 Sivasspor 2.
Dec 10: Gaziantepspor 0 Eskisehirspor 1.
Dec 11: Genclerbirligi 3 Orduspor 1; Antalyaspor 1 Ankaragucu 0; Besiktas 1 Istanbul BB 1; Mersin 1 Samsunspor 0; Trabzonspor 0 Galatasaray 3.
Dec 12: Sivasspor 2 Manisaspor 2; Kayserispor 2 Karabukspor 0; Bursaspor 0 Fenerbahce 2.
Dec 14: Trabzonspor 1 Genclerbirligi 2.
Dec 16: Orduspor 0 Galatasaray 2.
Dec 17: Karabukspor 3 Mersin 5; Ankaragucu 0 Gaziantepspor 0; Eskisehirspor 1 Kayserispor 0; Bursaspor 0 Antalyaspor 0.
Dec 18: Manisaspor 0 Genclerbirligi 1; Istanbul BB 1 Sivasspor 1; Samsunspor 1 Besiktas 1; Fenerbahce 1 Trabzonspor 0.
Dec 21: Antalyaspor 0 Fenerbahce 0; Kayserispor 3 Ankaragucu 0; Mersin 0 Eskisehirspor 0; Sivasspor 3 Samsunspor 2; Galatasaray 1 Manisaspor 0.
Dec 22: Trabzonspor 4 Orduspor 1; Genclerbirligi 4 Istanbul BB 0; Besiktas 1 Karabukspor 0; Gaziantepspor 2 Bursaspor 2.

TURKEY – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Galatasaray	17	11	4	2	27	11	37
Fenerbahce	17	10	5	2	24	14	35
Besiktas	17	9	5	3	25	17	32
Eskisehirspor	17	9	3	5	19	15	30
Genclerbirligi	17	8	4	5	25	20	28
Mersin	17	7	6	4	20	16	27
Kayserispor	17	8	1	8	21	17	25
Trabzonspor	17	6	6	5	24	21	24
Istanbul BB	17	6	6	5	21	20	24
Manisaspor	17	6	6	5	16	16	24
Sivasspor	17	6	6	5	26	29	24
Antalyaspor	17	5	6	6	13	16	21
Bursaspor	17	4	7	6	18	18	19
Orduspor	17	4	5	8	14	21	17
Gaziantepspor	17	3	7	7	14	18	16
Karabukspor	17	3	3	11	18	27	12
Samsunspor	17	2	6	9	12	22	12
Ankaragucu	17	1	4	12	15	34	7

34-round regular season (17x2); top 4 will form championship group, 5th to 8th will form Europa League place group, bottom 3 will be relegated

UKRAINE

Dec 9: Obolon 1 Tavriya 3.
Dec 10: Oleksandria 1 Metalist 3; Karpaty 0 Dynamo 1; Dnipro 1 Chornomorets 0; Arsenal 2 Vorskla 0.
Dec 11: Metalurh 3 Zorya 0; Volyn 0 Illichivets 1; Kryvbas 0 Shakhtar 4.

UKRAINE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	20	16	4	0	41	8	52
Shakhtar	20	16	3	1	54	12	51
Metalist	20	14	5	1	38	16	47
Dnipro	20	10	3	7	31	25	33
Kryvbas	20	9	4	7	18	19	31
Arsenal	20	8	6	6	23	17	30
Tavriya	20	8	6	6	29	24	30
Metalurh	20	9	2	9	25	22	29
Vorskla	20	6	6	8	25	29	24
Illichivets	20	6	5	9	20	30	23
Chornomorets	20	5	6	9	17	25	21
Volyn	20	5	4	11	18	31	19
Karpaty	20	3	7	10	17	30	16
Oleksandria	20	3	5	12	17	39	14
Zorya	20	3	3	14	15	40	12
Obolon	20	2	5	13	10	31	11

League now on winter break until Mar 2
30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Preliminary round draw

Arsenal (Arg) v Sport Huancayo (Per) (PR1)
Real Potosi (Bol) v Flamengo (Bra) (PR2)
Penarol (Uru) v Caracas (Ven) (PR3)
El Nacional (Ecu) v Libertad (Par) (PR4)
Internacional (Bra) v Once Caldas (Col) (PR5)
Union Espanola (Chl) v Tigres (Mex) (PR6)
1st legs - Jan 24-26; 2nd legs - Jan 31-Feb 2

Group stage draw

Group 1
Juan Aurich (Per), Santos (Bra), The Strongest (Bol), *PR5 winners*

Group 2
Emelec (Ecu), Lanus (Arg), Olimpia (Par), *PR2 winners*

Group 3
Atletico Junior (Col), Bolivar (Bol), Universidad Catolica (Chl), *PR6 winners*

Group 4
Boca Juniors (Arg), Fluminense (Bra), Zamora (Ven), *PR1 winners*

Group 5
Alianza Lima (Per), Nacional (Uru), Vasco da Gama (Bra), *PR4 winners*

Group 6
Corinthians (Bra), Cruz Azul (Mex), Deportivo Tachira (Ven), Nacional (Par)

Group 7
Defensor Sporting (Uru), Deportivo Quito (Ecu), Guadalajara (Mex), Velez Sarsfield (Arg)

Group 8
Atletico Nacional (Col), Godoy Cruz (Arg), Universidad de Chile (Chl), *PR3 winners*

Games to be played Feb 7-Apr 19
Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

SUDAMERICANA CUP

Final

1st leg
Dec 8
LDU Quito (Ecu) 0
Universidad de Chile (Chl) 1 (Vargas 43)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Abal (Arg)
LDU: Dominguez - Guagua, N Araujo, D Calderon, Reasco (Gamez 81), Ambrossi, Hidalgo, Acosta, Gonzalez, Barcos, Bieler (Bolanos 46).
Univ Chile: Herrera - Rodriguez, Acevedo, O Gonzalez, M Gonzalez, Rojas, Mena, Diaz, Aranguiz (Marino 88), Vargas (Magalhaes 90+1), Canales (Castro 73).

2nd leg
Dec 14
Universidad de Chile 3 (Vargas 2, 86, Lorenzetti 79)
LDU Quito 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Seneme (Bra)
Universidad de Chile 4-0 on agg
Univ Chile: Herrera - O Gonzalez, M Gonzalez, Rojas, Rodriguez, Aranguiz, Diaz, Mena, Castro (Lorenzetti 53), Vargas, Canales (Rivarola 86).
Sent off: Rodriguez 85min.
LDU: Dominguez - Reasco (Gamez 53), Guagua, N Araujo, D Calderon, Ambrossi, Acosta, Hidalgo, Gonzalez, Bolanos (W Calderon 73), Barcos.
Sent off: Guagua 67min.

ARGENTINA

Apertura

Dec 6: All Boys 1 Argentinos 0; Union 0 Lanus 1; Racing 1 Rafaela 0; Olimpo 0 Estudiantes 0.
Dec 7: Godoy Cruz 0 Colon 1; Arsenal 2 Boca 2.
Dec 8: Newell's 0 San Martin 0; Banfield 0 Belgrano 2; Tigre 1 Velez 3; San Lorenzo 0 Independiente 1.
Dec 11: Belgrano 1 Arsenal 0; Argentinos 1 Olimpo 0; Boca 1 All Boys 0; Estudiantes 2 Union 0.
Dec 12: Colon 4 Banfield 1; Lanus 2 Newell's 2; Independiente 2 Tigre 1; Rafaela 0 Godoy Cruz 2; Velez 1 Racing 0; San Martin 1 San Lorenzo 0.

ARGENTINA – APERTURA – FINAL*	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca (C)	19	12	7	0	25	6	43
Racing	19	7	10	2	16	8	31
Velez	19	9	4	6	22	17	31
Belgrano	19	8	7	4	21	16	31
Colon	19	8	7	4	19	15	31
Lanus	19	7	8	4	20	14	29
Tigre	19	7	6	6	22	19	27
Independiente	19	7	6	6	18	17	27
San Martin	19	6	8	5	17	14	26
Rafaela	19	8	2	9	22	26	26
Union	19	6	7	6	14	18	25
Godoy Cruz	19	6	6	7	28	24	24
Arsenal	19	6	6	7	21	20	24
Argentinos	19	5	7	7	18	24	22
All Boys	19	4	9	6	15	23	21
Estudiantes	18	5	5	8	22	23	20
San Lorenzo	19	5	4	10	13	19	19
Newell's	19	1	13	5	13	18	16
Olimpo	19	2	10	7	15	25	16
Banfield	18	3	2	13	12	27	11

No relegation after apertura
**Pending result of suspended Estudiantes v Banfield game (remaining time of game to be played in Feb)*

BOLIVIA

Apertura play-offs

Quarter-finals
1st legs - Dec 3/4; 2nd legs - Dec 7
Bolivar v The Strongest 1-0, 0-4 (agg 1-4)
Guabira v Oriente 0-0, 1-4 (agg 1-4)
Nacional v Universitario 2-3, 0-1 (agg 2-4)
San Jose v Aurora 1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0)

Semi-finals
1st legs - Dec 11/12; 2nd legs - Dec 14
The Strongest v Oriente 5-3, 0-1 (agg 5-4)
Universitario v San Jose 2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)

3rd-place play-off
1st leg - Dec 18; 2nd leg - Dec 21
Oriente v San Jose 1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2)

Final, 1st leg
Dec 18
The Strongest 2 (Melgar 45, Parada 90+1)
Universitario 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 28,304. **Ref:** Mancilla

Final, 2nd leg
Dec 22
Universitario 1 (Jeferson 86)
The Strongest 1 (Escobar 4)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Garcia
The Strongest 3-1 on agg

CHILE

CHILE – CLAUSURA: REGULAR – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Univ Chile	17	11	6	0	39	15	39
Cobreloa	17	9	4	4	27	17	31
Colo Colo	17	9	3	5	27	28	30
Audax Italiano	17	8	5	4	29	23	29
Univ Catolica	17	8	4	5	29	18	28
La Serena	17	8	4	5	26	23	28
La Calera	17	7	3	7	20	18	24
Espanola	17	6	5	6	31	23	23
Cobresal	17	6	5	6	22	29	23
Wanderers*	17	5	5	7	19	22	20
Iquique	17	5	5	7	30	41	20
Morning (R)	17	6	1	10	29	34	19
Nublense (R)	17	6	1	10	22	32	19
U Concepcion	17	4	7	6	20	21	19
Palestino	17	4	7	6	19	24	19
O'Higgins	17	4	5	8	23	26	17
Huachipato	17	4	5	8	25	30	17
San Felipe*	17	2	7	8	16	29	13

Top 8 entered championship play-offs; the 2 teams with fewest points in combined apertura/clausura table (Santiago Morning & Nublense) were relegated, *3rd & 4th fewest (Wanderers & San Felipe) stay in top flight after winning their respective rel/prom play-off

Clausura play-offs

Quarter-finals
1st legs - Dec 3/4; 2nd legs - Dec 10/11
Espanola v Univ Chile 0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
La Calera v Cobreloa 0-1, 3-4 (agg 3-5)
La Serena v Colo Colo 2-6, 1-3 (agg 3-9)
Univ Catolica v Audax Italiano 3-1, 1-0 (agg 4-1)

Semi-finals
1st legs - Dec 17/18; 2nd legs - Dec 20/22
Colo Colo v Cobreloa 2-3, 2-1 (agg 4-4, Cobreloa won on higher regular season placing)
Univ Catolica v Univ Chile 1-2, 2-1 (agg 3-3, Univ Chile won on higher regular season placing)

Child's play...young Kamara

AUSTRALIA

Kid Kamara comes on

Adelaide United midfielder Teeboy Kamara became the youngest player to appear in the A-League when he appeared as a substitute, at the age of 15 years and 212 days, in the 3-0 home defeat by Gold Coast United.

The youngster, who left his homeland of Liberia to escape civil unrest at the age of six, is an Australia under-17 international.

JAPAN

Capital club win Cup

Tokyo booked their place in the AFC Champions League by beating Kyoto Sanga 4-2 in the Emperor's Cup Final. Last season's J2 champions became the first second-tier side to win the competition, sealing victory with goals from Yasuyuki Konno, Masato Morishige and Lucas (two).

Tokyo will face J.League champions Kashiwa Reysol in February's Super Cup.

Machida Zelvia and Matsumoto Yamaga have officially been accepted into J2 as the J.League's two tiers expand to incorporate 40 clubs for the forthcoming season.

Final scorer...Konno

CLUB FOOTBALL

Final, 1st leg
Dec 26
Cobreloa 0
Univ Chile 0
Att: 10,268. **Ref:** Gamboa

Final, 2nd leg
Dec 29
Univ Chile 3 (Canales 25, Vargas 28, Rodriguez 36)
Cobreloa 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 44,870. **Ref:** Osses
Univ Chile 3-0 on agg

COLOMBIA

COLOMBIA – CLAUSURA: REGULAR – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Junior	18	8	7	3	28	22	31
Itagui	18	8	6	4	24	18	30
Once Caldas	18	8	5	5	34	23	29
Millonarios	18	8	4	6	21	17	28
Ind Santa Fe	18	8	4	6	22	19	28
Envigado	18	8	4	6	20	18	28
Chico	18	6	9	3	19	16	27
America (R)*	18	7	4	7	22	24	25
Quindio	18	7	4	7	23	26	25
Pereira (R)	18	5	9	4	23	16	24
Dep Cali	18	6	5	7	15	20	23
Nacional	18	5	7	6	24	23	22
Ind Medellin	18	6	4	8	26	28	22
Huila	18	6	4	8	20	22	22
Tolima	18	6	4	8	21	25	22
Cartagena	18	5	4	9	21	25	19
La Equidad	18	3	7	8	12	22	16
Cucuta	18	2	9	7	17	28	15

Top 8 entered championship play-offs; the team with fewest average points over the 3 most recent seasons (Pereira) were relegated, *America, the team with 2nd fewest average points, were relegated after losing the rel/prom play-off

Clausura play-offs

Quarter-finals
1st legs - Dec 3/4; 2nd legs - Dec 8
America v Once Caldas 0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Chico v Junior 0-0 (suspended), 2-2 (agg 2-2, Junior won 2pts to 1pt*)
Envigado v Millonarios 2-1, 1-2 (agg 3-3, Millonarios 7-6 on pens)
Ind Santa Fe v Itagui 3-2, 1-0 (agg 4-2)
**The federation awards 3pts for a win and 1pt for a draw in the play-off games, which normally makes no difference from listing just the aggregate score, as here; however, the 1st leg of Chico v Junior was suspended at half-time at 0-0 after a match official was hit by an object thrown from a Chico section of fans, and the federation decided to award Chico no points for the 1st leg draw while awarding Junior 1pt*

Semi-finals
1st legs - Dec 11; 2nd legs - Dec 14/15
Millonarios v Junior 3-0, 0-3 (agg 3-3, Junior 5-4 on pens)
Once Caldas v Ind Santa Fe 1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2)

Final, 1st leg
Dec 18
Junior 3 (Bacca pen 45, pen 57, V Hernandez 54)
Once Caldas 2 (Nunez 20, 40)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 40,200. **Ref:** Machado
Sent off: Mejia (Once Caldas) 68min

Final, 2nd leg
Dec 21
Once Caldas 2 (Pajoy 45+3, Beltran 70)
Junior 1 (Bacca 59)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 28,678. **Ref:** Roldan
Agg 4-4; Junior 4-2 on pens (away goals not considered)

ECUADOR

ECUADOR – 2ND STAGE – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dep Quito	22	13	5	4	34	15	44
Barcelona	22	12	4	6	29	21	40
El Nacional	22	11	4	7	40	33	37
Emelec	22	10	4	8	34	23	34
LDU Quito	22	10	4	8	32	23	34
Cuenca	22	8	8	6	29	23	32
Independiente	22	9	4	9	32	30	31
Olmedo	22	7	6	9	22	28	27
Manta	22	7	4	11	18	30	25
Imbabura (R)	22	7	4	11	26	40	25
LDU Loja	22	7	3	12	31	42	24
Espoli (R)	22	4	4	14	16	35	16

Dep Quito entered overall championship play-offs; the 2 teams with fewest points in combined 1st/2nd stage table (Imbabura & Espoli) were relegated

Overall championship play-offs

3rd-place match†
1st leg - Dec 11; 2nd leg - Dec 19
El Nacional v LDU Quito 2-1, 1-1 (agg 3-2)
**Contested by the teams finishing 3rd (LDU) & 4th (El Nacional) in the combined 1st/2nd stage table*

Final, 1st leg**
Dec 11
Emelec 0
Dep Quito 1 (Martinez 29)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 21,635. **Ref:** Carpio
Sent off: Paredes (Dep Quito) 62min
***Contested by the winners of the season's 1st stage (Emelec) & 2nd stage (Dep Quito)*

Final, 2nd leg
Dec 17
Dep Quito 1 (Alustiza 88)
Emelec 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 32,325. **Ref:** Intriago
Dep Quito 2-0 on agg
Sent off: Morante (Emelec) 53min

PARAGUAY

PARAGUAY – CLAUSURA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpia (C)	22	14	4	4	38	22	46
Cerro Porteno	22	12	7	3	41	22	43
Libertad	22	11	7	4	36	19	40
Nacional	22	11	3	8	34	27	36
Tacuary	22	7	9	6	31	28	30
Independiente	22	7	9	6	29	26	30
Sol America	22	7	7	8	27	30	28
Rubio Nu	22	7	6	9	25	29	27
Guarani	22	6	6	10	32	37	24
Caballero (R)	22	7	2	13	29	49	23
3 Febrero (R)	22	4	6	12	29	41	18
Luqueno	22	3	6	13	18	39	15

The 2 teams with the fewest average points over the 3 most recent seasons (General Caballero & 3 de Febrero) were relegated

PERU

PERU – REGULAR – REVISED FINAL TABLE*	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juan Aurich**	30	15	11	4	46	21	57
Al'nza Lima***	30	16	7	7	44	25	57
Huancayo	30	15	5	10	49	33	50
San Martin	30	13	8	9	43	24	47
Leon	30	14	4	12	37	30	46
Comercio	30	13	6	11	48	42	45
Inti Gas	30	12	8	10	42	41	44
Cienciano	30	12	4	14	42	46	40
Cobresol	30	9	12	9	31	40	39
Cristal	30	10	8	12	30	34	38
Sport Boys	30	10	6	14	26	49	36
Melgar	30	9	7	14	36	44	34
Cesar Vallejo	30	9	7	14	32	42	34
Universitario	30	8	10	12	25	35	34
CNI (R)	30	9	6	15	35	45	33
Al Atletico (R)	30	10	3	17	24	41	33

Top 2 went through to play-off final to decide champions
**Table revised after federation decided to nullify several results and re-award the points*
***Received 1 bonus point after Juan Aurich reserves finished runners-up in their championship*
****Received 2 bonus points after Alianza Lima reserves won their championship*

Championship play-off final

1st leg
Dec 8
Juan Aurich 1 (Zuniga 50)
Alianza Lima 2 (Arroe 19, Bazan 46)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 19,229. **Ref:** Buckley

2nd leg
Dec 11
Alianza Lima 0
Juan Aurich 1 (Zuniga 63)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 29,846. **Ref:** Carrillo
Sent off: Bazan 54min, Montano 87min (both Alianza); Zuniga 71min, Rojas 81min (both Juan Aurich)

Deciding game†
Dec 14
Alianza Lima 0
Juan Aurich 0
Aet. **Att:** 29,213. **Ref:** Rivera
Juan Aurich 3-1 on pens
†Deciding game took place as each team had won 1 leg of the Final (away goals not considered)

URUGUAY

URUGUAY – APERTURA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional (C)	15	9	5	1	30	11	32
Danubio*	15	8	5	2	19	8	31
Penarol	15	9	3	3	30	12	30
River Plate	15	8	4	3	22	17	28
Cerro Largo	15	8	3	4	18	16	27
Defensor	15	7	3	5	23	16	24
Cerro	15	7	3	5	17	12	24
Liverpool	15	6	1	8	17	18	19
Tanque Sisley	15	5	3	7	15	23	18
Wanderers	15	5	2	8	23	25	17
Racing*	15	4	6	5	20	23	17
Rampla	15	5	1	9	16	22	16
Fenix	15	4	4	7	15	22	16
Rentistas	15	4	2	9	10	21	14
Cerrito	15	3	4	8	10	23	13
Bella Vista	15	3	1	11	9	25	10

No relegation after apertura
**Danubio were awarded 3pts and Racing had 1pt deducted after their 1-1 draw because Racing fielded an ineligible player; but the game is still credited as a draw in the table*

VENEZUELA

VENEZUELA – APERTURA – FINAL*	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lara (C)	17	12	5	0	39	12	41
Caracas	17	11	3	3	27	13	36
Petare	17	10	5	2	28	15	35
Anzoategui	17	9	3	5	16	11	30
Zulia	17	7	6	4	28	20	27
Mineros	16	7	4	5	19	21	25
Yaracuyanos	17	6	6	5	24	17	24
Zamora	16	5	8	3	22	17	23
Aragua	16	5	7	4	14	18	22
Monagas	17	6	3	8	20	23	21
Trujillanos	17	5	5	7	22	21	20
Esppor	17	5	5	7	18	23	20
Tachira	17	5	5	7	14	21	20
El Vigia	17	4	5	8	17	25	17
Tucanes	17	3	4	10	21	30	13
Llaneros	17	2	7	8	18	28	13
Estudiantes	17	1	8	8	15	37	11
Carabobo	16	1	5	10	16	26	8

No relegation after apertura
**Pending results of the Zamora v Mineros and Carabobo v Aragua games*

CONCACAF

MEXICO

Apertura

Final, 1st leg
Dec 8
Santos 0
Tigres 1 (Alvarez 8)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Delgadillo
Sent off: Rodriguez (Santos) 22min

Final, 2nd leg
Dec 11
Tigres 3 (Mancilla 52, Danilinho 64, Pulido 86)
Santos 1 (Peralta 30)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 45,531. **Ref:** Rodriguez
Tigres 4-1 on agg
Sent off: Jimenez (Tigres) 69min; Sanchez 11min, Baloy 69min (both Santos)

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round draw

Amadou Diallo (IvC) v Diables Noirs (Con)
ASFA Yennenga (BuF) v ASO Chlef (Alg)
ASGNN (Ngr) v Tonnerre d'Abomey (Ben)
Brikama United (Gam) v US Ouakam (Sen)
Coin Nord (Com) v Ethiopian Coffee (Eth)
DFC 8eme (CAR) v Astres Douala (Cam)
Foullah Edifice (Chd) v JSM Bejaia (Alg)
Green Mamba (Swa) v Platinum (Zim)
Japan Actuel's (Mad) v Power Dynamos (Zam)
LISCR (Lbr) v Berekum Chelsea (Gha)
Mafunzo (Zan) v Liga Muculmana (Moz)
Missile (Gab) v Africa Sports (IvC)
Orlando Pirates (SAf) v Recreativo Libolo (Ang)
Ports Authority (SLe) v Horoya (Gui)
Revenue Authority (Uga) v Correctional Services (Les)
Sony Ela Nguema (EqG) v Dolphin (Nga)
Tusker (Ken) v APR (Rwa)
Vita Club (DRC) v Atletico Olympic (Bdi)
Young Africans (Tan) v Zamalek (Egy)
1st legs - Feb 17-19; 2nd legs - Mar 2-4

KUWAIT

Penalty finale

Al Arabi beat Al Qadsia 4-1 on penalties in the Final of the Crown Prince Cup.

OMAN

AFC Cup entrants

Dhofar will join Oman league champions Al Suwaiq in this year's AFC Cup after they beat Al Ittihad 1-0, with a goal from Ali Salim, in the Sultan Cup Final.

Winner...Dhofar's Hashim Saleh

THAILAND

Maiden championship

Buriram PEA have won the Thai Premier League for the first time in the club's history.

A 3-1 win over Army United meant that, with four games to go, closest rivals Chonburi and Muang Thong United could not catch them.

YEMEN

Super Cup success

Reigning domestic champions Al Arouba won the Yemen Super Cup, beating Al Tilal 1-0 at the Ali Mohsen Al Muraisi Stadium with a goal from Ftai Adisa Alaw.

Byes to next round
Al Ahly (Egy), Al Hilal (Sud), Al Merreikh (Sud), Cotonsport (Cam), Djoliba (Mli), Dynamos (Zim), Esperance (Tun), Etoile Sahel (Tun), Maghreb Fes (Mor), Raja Casablanca (Mor), Stade Malien (Mli), Sunshine Stars (Nga), TP Mazembe (DRC)

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round draw

AC Leopard (Con) v Tempete Mocaf (CAR)
ADR Mansaba (GuB) v Invincible Eleven (Lbr)
Black Leopards (SAf) v Motor Action (Zim)
Dragons de l'Oueme (Ben) v Etoile Filante (BuF)
Extension Gunners (Bot) v Tana (Mad)
Ferroviario Maputo (Moz) v Gor Mahia (Ken)
Gamtel (Gam) v Casa Sport (Sen)
Jamhuri (Zan) v Hwange Colliery (Zim)
Kiyovu (Rwa) v Simba (Tan)
Lydia Academic (Bdi) v Atletico Semu (EqG)
Mangasport (Gab) v St George (Eth)
Nania (Gha) v Sequence (Gui)
Red Arrows (Zam) v Royal Leopards (Swa)
Renaissance (Chd) v Sahel (Ngr)
Sewe Sports (IvC) v Unisport Bafang (Cam)
Union Douala (Cam) v Kallon (SLe)
1st legs - Feb 17-19; 2nd legs - Mar 2-4

Byes to next round
Al Ahli Shendi (Sud), Amal Atbara (Sud), ASEC Abidjan (IvC), Club Africain (Tun), CO Bamako (Mli), COD Meknes (Mor), CS Sfaxien (Tun), ENPPI (Egy), ES Setif (Alg), Heartland (Nga), InterClube (Ang), Real Bamako (Mli), St Eloi Lupopo (DRC), Tshinkunku (DRC), Warri Wolves (Nga), Wydad Casablanca (Mor)

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round draw

East Asia zone
Pohang Steelers (SKo) v *Thailand reps (cup winners)* (Feb 18)

West Asia zone
1st round
Esteghlal (Irn) v Zob Ahan (Irn) (Feb 11)

2nd round
Al Shabab (UAE) v Neftchi (Uzb) (Feb 18)
Esteghlal OR Zob Ahan v Al Ettifaq (Sau)

All preliminary round ties are single-leg only

Group stage draw

Group A
Al Jazira (UAE), Al Rayyan (Qat), Nasaf (Uzb), *Al Ettifaq OR Esteghlal OR Zob Ahan*

Group B
Al Arabi (Qat), Al Ittihad (Sau), Bani Yas (UAE), Pakhtakor (Uzb)

Group C
Al Ahli (Sau), Al Nasr (UAE), Lekhwiya (Qat), Sepahan (Irn)

Group D
Al Gharafa (Qat), Al Hilal (Sau), Persepolis (Irn), *Al Shabab OR Neftchi*

Group E
Adelaide United (Aus), Bunyodkor (Uzb), Gamba Osaka (Jap), *Pohang Steelers OR Thai cup winners*

Group F
Beijing Guoan (Chn), Brisbane Roar (Aus), Tokyo (Jap), Ulsan Hyundai (SKo)

Group G
Central Coast Mariners (Aus), Nagoya Grampus (Jap), Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma (SKo), Tianjin Teda (Chn)

Group H
Buriram (Tha), Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn), Jeonbuk Motors (SKo), Kashiwa Reysol (Jap)

Matchdays *Mar 6/7, Mar 20/21, Apr 3/4, Apr 17/18, May 1/2, May 15/16*

Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

AUSTRALIA

Regular season
Dec 9: Brisbane 1 Melbourne Heart 2.
Dec 10: Wellington 1 Perth 0; Central Coast 2 Newcastle 0; Melbourne Victory 1 Adelaide 1.
Dec 11: Gold Coast 0 Sydney 0.
Dec 14: Wellington 2 Brisbane 0.
Dec 16: Adelaide 0 Gold Coast 3.
Dec 17: Newcastle 1 Sydney 2; Brisbane 1 Central Coast 2; Perth 1 Melbourne Heart 2.
Dec 18: Melbourne Victory 3 Wellington 1.
Dec 22: Sydney 2 Adelaide 2.
Dec 23: Wellington 5 Newcastle 2; Melbourne Heart 3 Melbourne Victory 2; Perth 1 Central Coast 3.
Dec 26: Gold Coast 1 Brisbane 0.
Dec 29: Sydney 0 Melbourne Heart 4.
Dec 30: Adelaide 2 Wellington 0.
Dec 31: Newcastle 1 Perth 1; Central Coast 0 Gold Coast 0; Brisbane 3 Melbourne Victory 1.

AUSTRALIA – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Central Coast	13	8	3	2	22	10	27
Melbourne H	13	7	3	3	23	15	24
Brisbane	14	7	2	5	27	15	23
Sydney	13	5	4	4	16	18	19
Wellington	14	5	3	6	18	17	18
Melbourne V	13	3	6	4	17	19	15
Perth	13	4	2	7	12	19	14
Newcastle	13	4	2	7	15	23	14
Adelaide	13	3	5	5	12	23	14
Gold Coast	13	3	4	6	15	18	13

27-round regular season (9x3); top 6 will enter championship play-offs; no relegation from this league

IRAN

IRAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Esteghlal	17	11	3	3	30	17	36
Sepahan	17	8	6	3	26	15	30
Naft Tehran	17	8	6	3	26	20	30
Teraktor Sazi	17	8	5	4	30	22	29
Saba	17	8	5	4	21	17	29
Zob Ahan	17	5	9	3	18	18	24
Damash	17	6	5	6	21	22	23
Sanat Naft	17	6	5	6	25	27	23
Persepolis	17	5	7	5	20	19	22
Saipa	17	5	6	6	24	22	21
Foolad	17	5	6	6	13	17	21
Shahin	17	4	8	5	16	16	20
Shahrdari	17	4	8	5	19	23	20
Rah Ahan	17	1	13	3	17	21	16
Fajr	17	3	7	7	17	23	16
Mes Kerman	17	4	4	9	15	21	16
Malavan	17	3	6	8	19	21	15
Mes Sarch'me	17	3	3	11	13	29	12

Standings on Jan 3
34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

OCEANIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Waitakere (NZ)	3	3	0	0	15	0	9
Tefana (Tah)	3	1	1	1	5	12	4
Ba (Fij)	3	1	0	2	3	9	3
Mont-Dore (NC)	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

Group B
Dec 10: Hekari United (PNG) 3 Koloale (Sol) 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland (NZ)	2	2	0	0	6	1	6
Amicale (Van)	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Hekari Utd	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Koloale	3	0	0	3	2	9	0

Remaining matchdays* *Feb 18/19, Mar 3/4, Mar 31 (*plus Auckland v Amicale, Jan 18)*

Group winners qualify for Final

NEW ZEALAND

NEW ZEALAND – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland	5	5	0	0	20	4	15
Waitakere	6	4	0	2	17	7	12
Canterbury	6	4	0	2	12	5	12
T Wellington	6	3	0	3	10	7	9
Otago	6	3	0	3	6	13	9
Hawkes Bay	4	1	1	2	5	7	4
Waikato	5	1	0	4	5	18	3
YoungHeart	6	0	1	5	5	19	1

Standings on Jan 3
14-round regular season; top 4 will enter championship play-offs

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions (R) = relegated (Q) = qualifie

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

February 8
Libertadores Cup group games start
February 12
African Nations Cup Final
February 14 and 15
UEFA Champions League round of 16 1st legs
February 15
Libertadores Cup group games
February 16
Europa League round of 32 1st legs
February 18
AFC Champions League qualifying Final
February 21 and 22
UEFA Champions League round of 16 1st legs
February 22
Libertadores Cup group games
February 23
Europa League round of 32 2nd legs
February 29
World Cup: Asia third round, final group games

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EDITOR Gavin Hamilton
ART EDITOR Gary Payne
ASSISTANT EDITOR Nich Hills
PICTURE EDITOR Duncan Bond
NEWS EDITOR Jamie Rainbow
EDITORIAL SECRETARY June Hiscock
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EDITORIAL
Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SU
Tel: +44 (0) 20 3148 4817
Fax: +44 (0) 20 3148 8130
E-mail: world_soccer@ipcmedia.com

ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP
Agi Power
Tel: +44 (0) 20 3148 2537
+44 (0) 20 3148 2823
E-mail: agi_power@ipcmedia.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER Tom Jennings
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR Hamish Dawson
MANAGING DIRECTOR Paul Williams

Advertising +44 (0) 20 3148 2537
+44 (0) 20 3148 2823
Back issues +44 (0) 20 3148 4816
Binders +44 (0) 20 3148 4816

International licensing enquiries
+44 (0) 20 314 85490
E-mail: bianca_hamilton-foster@ipcmedia.com

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SUBSCRIPTIONS DEPARTMENT
Rockwood House, 9-17 Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 3DH, England Tel: +44 (0) 1444 475 675

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THE GREAT TEAMS

Manchester United 1968

Ten years on from the Munich air disaster, Matt Busby's side became the first English team to win the European Cup

United... Busby and his squad with the European Cup

As Manchester United paraded the European Cup around Wembley, the crowd chanted one name above all others. United manager Matt Busby had reached the pinnacle of the European game a decade after surviving an air crash that had all but wiped out his "Busby Babes" side.

Seven players were among the 23 people killed at Munich airport on February 6, 1958, as United, the reigning English champions, flew back from a European Cup semi-final against Red Star Belgrade. The most talented player of all, Duncan Edwards, died from his injuries two weeks later.

Busby rebuilt his side around survivors Bobby Charlton and Bill Foulkes. Money was also spent on new players, with Denis Law signed for £115,000 from Torino. But Busby's commitment to youth shone through in the development of such players as John Aston, Brian Kidd and, above all, George Best.

Best had been the star when United pulverised Benfica in a 1966 European Cup quarter-final, winning 5-1 in Lisbon, and, two years later, the Portuguese were again the opponents as United reached their first European Final.

Charlton gave United the lead with a header, but Benfica fought back to take the game into extra-time. Roared on a by partisan Wembley crowd, Best, Kidd and Charlton all scored to enable Busby to complete his European dream. WS

THE MANAGER AND HIS TEAM

Matt Busby

The Scotsman built several outstanding teams during three decades at Old Trafford. He told *World Soccer*, in 1965, that following the Munich disaster he "was lost and sorrowing and, for a short period, utterly defeated." He said: "A man's help at such a time is not his experience, but his faith and the love and encouragement of his friends." He stepped down as manager eight months after the Wembley triumph, later becoming a club director. He died in 1994, aged 84.

Outstanding...Busby

Tactics

Under Busby, United's formation was far from revolutionary, but they did establish a global reputation for playing fast-paced, entertaining football.

The acclaimed attacking triumvirate of Best, Charlton and Denis Law was crucial to that reputation – although Law missed the 1968 European Cup semi-final and Final because of a knee injury.

In midfield, Stiles was the midfield battler whose hard-working endeavours provided a base to allow Charlton to attack, while Crerand played a key role as both destroyer and creator.

THE FIRST XI

Alex Stepney
Goalkeeper
He earned deserved applause from Eusebio for a crucial save late in normal time at Wembley.

Shay Brennan
Right-back
Republic of Ireland international who made his debut in 1958 in the aftermath of Munich.

Bill Foulkes
Centre-back
Long-serving defender and one of two survivors, along with Charlton, of the air disaster.

David Sadler
Centre-back
Cool-headed, he spent 11 seasons at Old Trafford after joining from non-league Maidstone United.

Tony Dunne
Left-back
Dublin-born, he was outstanding in the Wembley Final. Spent 13 seasons with United.

Paddy Crerand
Midfielder
Tenacious fetcher, carrier and distributor who signed for United in 1963 from Celtic.

Bobby Charlton
Midfielder
Dynamic captain and 1966 World Cup-winner who survived the 1958 Munich air crash.

Nobby Stiles
Midfielder
Tough-tackling, 1966 World Cup-winner. Wore strong contact lenses on the pitch.

George Best
Winger
Belfast-born scorer of a brilliant goal in the Final. Voted 1968 European Footballer of the Year.

Brian Kidd
Forward
Manchester-born striker who scored against Benfica at Wembley on his 19th birthday.

John Aston
Forward
One of the star performers at Wembley. His father, John senior, also played for United.

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